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THIS BOOK is a fully documented description of the domestic life of all ranks of Scottish society in the eighteenth century. Among numerous other matters, it deals with family relations and the upbringing of children, housing, furniture, fuel, water-supply and sanitation, gardens, food and drink, cooking, servants, clothes, pastimes, etiquette, weddings, christenings and the like. Local variations and local prejudices receive due attention, and the shocked or approving comments of foreign observers bring out an occasional amusing contrast with conditions in other lands.

It is a work calculated to interest the general reader no less than the student of social history. The sources upon which it is based include parish accounts, diaries, household books, letters, family histories, records of travellers, and contemporary manuals of gardening and cookery, to all of which full references are given.

‘A notable piece of work which bears its learning lightly and is as attractive to the general reader as to the historian. It is one of the best studies of its kind.’

—*The Manchester Guardian*

‘Miss Plant has explored thoroughly a subject merely outlined by previous writers, and her book is likely to become the standard work in its field.’

—*The Scotsman*

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FRONTISPIECE TO THE 1835 REPRINT OF ADAM PETRIE'S  
"RULES OF GOOD DEPORTMENT"

Commissioned from Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe by Sir Walter Scott,  
who had intended to reprint the work (which was first published in  
1720) for the Bannatyne Club

The  
Domestic Life of Scotland  
in the  
Eighteenth Century

by  
Marjorie Plant



Edinburgh  
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1952





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## Foreword

The mode of life in the early eighteenth-century Scottish home was apt, in general, to be somewhat crude. The economic conditions of the time were not conducive to easy housekeeping. Although the housewife's familiar complaint of the scarcity and general "naughtiness" of servants might not now win her the sympathy which she would demand, she had far weightier problems which she seems most of the time to have accepted as they came. It is often only through stray passages in her letters, or through the comments of incredulous visitors from the south, that we know of them. Those problems, we must bear in mind, were not the same everywhere. Each district had its own drawbacks and its own natural advantages. The bane of Edinburgh life was that all the water required in its lofty tenements had to be carried upstairs by hand; but the Edinburgh household could at least burn coal—there were places in the north and west where the only fuel was heath or dung.

The exceedingly primitive state of agriculture limited the greater part of the population to a meagre and monotonous diet. There were few vegetables and only salt meat, if any, for the winter months. The monotony was increased in that, throughout the Highlands and in many remote districts elsewhere, the individual household had to fend almost entirely for itself. The nearest shop might be fifty miles away. Food, clothing, soap, candles and all else had to be produced at home. The country housewife who needed a new gown had to spin the wool for it from sheep which she had probably tended herself; she herself grew the flax for her sheets and table-linen. It was a busy life and a lonely one. Visitors were few and far between. Sudden illness, far from medical aid, was a constant dread. It was

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the inadequacy of means of communication which was largely to blame.

The state of the roads at that time could hardly have been worse. Few of them would take wheeled traffic. Goods, wherever possible, were carried by sea; otherwise there was a slow delivery by pack-horse. Although some improvement was made from 1726 onwards, when a few good military roads were built in the Highlands, it was not until some thirty years later that much attention was paid to road construction elsewhere. Then began a systematic development of turnpike roads, and enterprising coach proprietors soon inaugurated services to link the principal towns. In addition to the obvious economic advantages of this, social gatherings became possible on a scale hitherto unknown.

People in Edinburgh and in other districts within easy reach of the east coast ports had always had an advantage over the rest: supplies of food and household utensils came by sea from other parts of Scotland and also from London and the Continent. But in the early eighteenth century Scottish manufactures and foreign imports alike were at a low ebb. The fairly successful development of industry during the preceding century had taken place behind a protective tariff. One of the immediate effects of the parliamentary union with England in 1707 was to remove this barrier, and it was some time before the benefits of free trade, and of the Union generally, overcame the resulting dislocation of economic life. In due course, however, as the American trade expanded, Glasgow rose to importance as a port, and Scottish manufactures of various kinds were stimulated to meet the new demand for exports.

By the middle of the century new forces and new developments were beginning to affect all walks of life. Soon Scotland found herself well on the way to prosperity, with a well-established linen manufacture, a number of minor industries, better communications and the beginnings of an efficient banking system. It needed only the technical inventions of the next fifty years, introduced with the aid of English capital, to bring about a more rapid expansion.

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By 1800 the calico manufacture had attained an importance far beyond that of linen; factories had arisen for such subsidiary processes as bleaching and dyeing; and iron and steel production was about to enter upon a period of intense activity.

Progress was not confined to manufactures. Agriculture, too, entered on a new phase. From the 'twenties onwards enthusiasts up and down the country formed themselves into societies for the discussion of agricultural methods, and tackled the problems of estate management with extra zest. Later, in the second half of the century, came a rapid increase in population, to act as yet another stimulus. Not the least of the new achievements was the introduction of the potato into Scotland as a regular field crop, bringing it for the first time to the table of the ordinary man.

By the end of the century these various changes had led, directly or indirectly, to greater comfort in the home. Food was fresher, more varied and more palatable. It was more tastefully served, on pewter or china plates instead of on the old wooden platters. There were more shops, selling a wider range of goods. The housewife had no longer to spend hours at her spinning-wheel, for there were more attractive materials to be bought than she could make at home. Her husband, in any case, now scorned to wear homespun; he wanted the best English cloth, and a watch to put in his pocket. The wages of domestic servants, among others, had doubled, and the maids who used to go about barefoot and ill-kempt could now dress in the best of style.

The ministers of the kirk, as we shall see, deplored the new trend towards luxury and ostentation, sighing for the return of austerity and a more sedate way of life. But it was still far from being a frivolous age. Philosophical and theological argument, which had flourished during the more austere decades, now admittedly had fallen a little out of fashion, but instead there was a growing enthusiasm for literature and the arts. If, in addition, the younger generation had discovered some of the lighter joys of leisure, who was to grudge them their fun?



## Chapter I

# The Family and its Upbringing

The problem of the only child was not one with which eighteenth-century Scotland was much concerned. Edinburgh, during the later years, had an average household of six persons,<sup>1\*</sup> and from such figures as are available that would seem to have been fairly representative of the country as a whole. In some districts families were larger. Take, for instance, Oathlaw, a parish in Angus: of the total of thirty-nine families living there when the old *Statistical Account* was compiled (in or about 1790) sixteen consisted of ten or more persons, five of twenty or more, one of thirty-three and one of forty-four. In other parishes, too, families of eight to thirteen children were fairly common.<sup>2</sup> Mortality among the poorer classes was high, but it was not always the poor who had the most children: in Orkney, we are specifically told, it was the "better sort of people" who had the families of ten to thirty-six.<sup>3</sup> Whatever one may think of such numbers, it would be well to bear in mind that Admiral Robert Duff, brother-in-law of the 2nd Earl Fife, and one of the naval governors of Newfoundland, was one of the youngest of thirty-six!

Large families did prevent life from being dull, especially when, in a remote region such as Shetland, a wedding party could be enlivened by a country dance of eight couples, consisting of the father and mother of the bride and their seven sons and seven daughters.<sup>4</sup> But there was another side to the story—the practical side, which Lady Balcarres once pointed out to a friend: "I'm very thrifty",

\* All numbered references are grouped by chapters at the end of the text.

she wrote; "and you would think it very necessary, had you seen us some nights ago at a family ball, when we were about fifty souls, all belonging to this identical house; literally all of them breakfast, dine, and sup off our little bit land".<sup>5</sup>

It might be thought that in such a prolific age parents would scarcely bother about the sex of their offspring. No greater mistake could be made. Boys were wanted—boys every time. "God bliss Franscis", wrote Anna Duchess of Buccleuch in 1720 or thereabouts, "and give him sones and no daughters."<sup>6</sup> When Providence did not oblige there was apt to be trouble, as when Lady Eglinton, wife of the ninth Earl, had the misfortune to present her husband first of all with a daughter, "which my lord took very ill and unchristianly";<sup>7</sup> but the poor lady produced several more daughters to darken his lordship's countenance before the son and heir did at last arrive. James, Earl of Balcarres, in contrast, was tremendously proud of his eleven children: he had even been known, when they all trooped in after dinner, to stop abusing Queen Elizabeth in order to point them out to his guest;<sup>8</sup> but it so happened that eight of them were boys.

Quite apart from the natural desire for an heir, parents knew that girls threatened to be a lifelong drain on the family's resources. As in England, although the sons could take up one of the professions, there was nothing for the daughters of the upper classes but to stay at home, where, in Scotland at all events, they were expected to busy themselves with housework of all kinds. "Our eldest sons get our estates", Sir Walter Scott once pointed out to Maria Edgeworth; "our younger girls live at home while Mamma can keep house on her jointure, get husbands if they can, and if not, do as they can on the interest of £1500 or £2000. The elder brother is in general an honest fellow, but embarrassed with debts; he keeps his sisters in his house if his wife is not cross; and a sort of half family pride, half family affection, carries the thing through."<sup>9</sup> The difficulty could be avoided, and sometimes was, by



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making provision in the marriage settlement for any daughters of the marriage.

One of the most marked differences between English and Scottish home life was in the attitude to children. A French visitor to England in the early eighteenth century was struck by the extraordinary amount of attention paid to young children : their elders seemed always to be fondling them and holding them up to admiration, whereas French infants were kept in complete subjection.<sup>10</sup> (That actually had been the fate of English children some fifty or sixty years before.) If our traveller had gone on to the Scottish Lowlands he would have found that the children there were brought up as strictly as those in France. They were not allowed to speak or sit down in the presence of their parents,<sup>11</sup> who treated their sons and daughters of all ages with aloofness and formality. Lady Douglas, to give a typical example, when writing to her mother, Lady Conyng-ham, in 1735, addressed her as "Dear Madam", and signed herself, "Your affectionate Daughter and humble obedient Servant".<sup>12</sup> Little Lady Lucie Stuart, again, having had the temerity to joke in a letter which she wrote to her mother from the Parisian convent in which she was being educated, apologised for her familiarity, adding, "I assure you, dear madam, it is not that I have forgott the respect I ow to your Ladyship, for it is to make you laugh".<sup>13</sup> But when, in 1746, the Duke of Atholl heard of a flirtation which was being carried on in Edinburgh by his daughter, Lady Jean Murray, and summoned her away, she wrote back a most rebellious letter—signing herself, nevertheless, "My Dearest Papa's most aff., most Dutifull, most Obedient Daughter".<sup>14</sup>

The centre of this formality, and the officially undisputed head of the household, was the father. All the domestic arrangements were made to suit his convenience and to uphold his dignity.<sup>15</sup> He had his own chair by the fireside, or at the head of the table, in which no one else dared to sit ; and in the early part of the century, at all events, he kept his hat on while he occupied it. At meal times special

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dishes were often served for him alone. The children and servants approached him in awe. Not always so his wife. Over two centuries earlier a Spanish ambassador at the court of James IV had described Scottish women as courteous but bold, and absolute mistresses of their husbands in everything relating to the running of the home,<sup>16</sup> and Lord Braxfield, for one, was still somewhat henpecked. When the butler gave notice because his mistress was always scolding him, his lordship exclaimed, "Lord! ye've little to complain o': ye may be thankfu' ye're no married to her!"<sup>17</sup> Another sufferer was Sir John Anstruther of Elie, of whom, when he published his work on *Drill Husbandry*, a friend remarked that no one could be better qualified to write on that subject, since there was not a better drilled husband in all Fife.<sup>18</sup> All the same, for what they were worth, there was no lack of wifely protests of submission to the husband's will.<sup>19</sup>

By the middle of the century life was becoming a little less rigorous, but children still had anything but an easy time. Lady Anne Lindsay, for instance, acknowledged in after life that she and her brothers and sisters had received excellent training from their mother, Lady Balcarres, in the rules of conduct and independence of mind;<sup>20</sup> but she added, "Had she but accompanied this sometimes with a little of a mother's fondness, what a foundation of tenderness as well as veneration would have been laid in our hearts!" In setting out to fit her eleven children for the hardships of life Lady Balcarres acted with such severity that her husband would occasionally interfere, remonstrating, "Ods-fish, Madam! you will break the spirits of my young troops,—I will not have it so!" According to Lady Anne, the house was often "a sort of little Bastile, in every closet of which was to be found a culprit,—some were sobbing and repeating verbs, others eating their bread and water—some preparing themselves to be whipped, and here and there a fat little Cupid, who, having been flogged by Venus, was enjoying a most enviable nap". Lady Anne herself was quite contented with her frequent punishment diet of

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bread and water, though she did whisper to the butler one day to give her a bit of oatcake by way of variety.

Probably the typical Scottish child was too high-spirited to be unduly curbed by that kind of treatment. The Lindsay children certainly seem to have been irrepressible. Lady Anne recalled that on one occasion they decided that, what with languages, geography, arithmetic and other trials, their lot was worse than that of the Children of Israel. Margaret, the third child, who had a taste for public speaking, announced a plan of revolt; she complained of hard laws and little play, and offered to take her brothers and sisters to a family with whom she had once spent a week after whooping-cough "very agreeably indeed". She was certain that they would be received kindly and given a home, and would be much happier than in their present "horrious" life. The proposal was carried joyfully, and they set out straight away; but as they could not think of leaving behind their little brother James, who was not yet in breeches, they were hampered by having to take turns at carrying him. Unhappily for their scheme, old Robin Gray, the shepherd, saw their procession, and rushed to his mistress crying, "All the young gentlemen and the young ladies, and all the dogs, are run away, my lady!" The young criminals were accordingly brought back and taken before the Countess, who declared that whipping was too good for them, and that instead they should each have a dose of tincture of rhubarb to teach them to stay at home. The eldest, as the most guilty, was given the last and nastiest dose in the bottle.

Another lady who tried to keep her family in good order was Lady Elphinstone, and it is to be feared that her young visitors would *not* remember her house as one where they were very agreeably entertained. One boy who stayed with her disliked porridge. Her ladyship ordained that until he had eaten his share he should have nothing else. The little boy, in revulsion against the unpalatable mess, decided that he would rather starve than eat it, and did without either breakfast or dinner. A kind friend, taking pity on him,

invited him to supper, intending to give him a good feed. But just before the meal Lady Elphinstone's man arrived with the announcement: "Lady Elphinstone's compliments, and this is Master John's porridge!" At that point John thought it best to give in. Wisely or not, Lady Elphinstone's brother, Sir Gilbert Elliot, adopted the same policy: he ordered that his son Andrew should have boiled mutton for dinner and supper "until he learned to like it".<sup>21</sup>

It would be wrong to give the impression that children had a really unhappy time. The Lindsay children, although they had their trials, had many pleasures, such as paddling in the glen not far from their castle in Fife, playing at swing, or visiting the oxen in the farmyard and eating their turnips. Sunday had its own particular treat—eleven heaps of sweets of all kinds and shapes which their father had ready for them on the dinner-table. Most fun of all were the daring raids on pantry or garden for tarts or forbidden fruit, all faithfully shared to the last morsel in the children's unofficial headquarters, the privy at the end of the garden. The risk involved in such pranks was great, but well worth while. And that, no doubt, was the considered opinion of another set of youngsters, who, taking advantage of their uncle's colour-blindness, induced him to go to a funeral in stockings of two different colours.<sup>22</sup>

Young children in the Highlands, even as late as 1750, had a very rough-and-tumble existence in comparison with those elsewhere. As infants they were simply wrapped in a blanket and nursed in what was described as "a very homely and masculine Manner", or carried about the house naked. They were "nourished with good and substantial Cheer, not with Dates and Sugar Plumbs", and as soon as their legs would carry them they were allowed to toddle off, up hills and down dales, many of them without any clothing even in the depth of winter.<sup>23</sup> Until they were six or seven years old the children of the gentry were frequently as neglected as the rest; in fact, it was a common saying that a gentleman's bairns could be distinguished only by their speaking English.<sup>24</sup> (Towards the end of the

century that would not have been so certain ; Mrs. Grant of Laggan, for instance, disliking the growing tendency to adopt English customs, taught her children Gaelic to begin with, and no English at all until they were four or five years old.<sup>25</sup>)

When a son was born to a Highland chief there was usually great competition among the vassals for the privilege of acting as his foster-parent, according to the regular custom.<sup>26</sup> A lifelong affection often arose between the young laird and his foster-brothers and -sisters, and it was not uncommon for one of the foster-brothers to become the henchman of the future chief. The children so brought up were no doubt carefully tended, but the natural result was that they cared more for their foster-parents than for their own. Susan Ferrier's father, who was sent out to be nursed soon after his birth in 1744, became so fond of his foster-mother that he could not be persuaded to return home until he was thirteen.<sup>27</sup>

By about 1780 children everywhere were enjoying a little more comfort, much though some of their elders deplored the lapse of the old austerity. Elizabeth Grant had delightful recollections of her childhood at her northern home of Rothiemurchus : of the old nursery, with a fire on the hearth, two wooden cribs, a cradle, and a press-bed for the nurse, into which the children scrambled every morning ; of the low table at which they sat on stools to eat their morning porridge, which their nurse tried to make appetising for them by strewing it with brown sugar ; and of the pictures which the kind soul set the children to look at while she tidied the room before setting off with them for a whole day out of doors.<sup>28</sup> Times had indeed changed.

The education of the laird's sons could be provided for in various ways. Some went to English schools, either to Eton or Winchester or to academies in London.<sup>29</sup> For the rest, just as in England the squire's sons were often sent to the nearest grammar school with sons of yeomen and shop-keepers, the laird's boys were sent to the local school, if there was one, to be taught on equal terms with the sons

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of their father's tenants and employees. Alternatively they could be sent to boarding-school in Scotland, or to board with a private family and attend a day school. Or they could be taught at home by a private tutor.

Where there *was* a local school that was the usual choice, and the word "local" is not to be interpreted in any narrow sense.<sup>30</sup> Small boys in unwilling search of education might have to trudge for miles, in bad weather or fine, carrying enough food with them to last the day. They had to set out early to be there in time. As in England, most schools opened at seven; but in 1737 the Presbytery of Inverurie, in an unkind moment, ruled that its own particular school should open in the morning as soon as the children could see to do their work and not close until dusk.<sup>31</sup> The early hours must have been as much of a trial to the rest of the household as they were to the little victims for whom they were prescribed. There was no encouragement for sluggards, especially where (as at Dornoch) it was the duty of the school janitor to walk round the town early in the morning, horn in hand, and go to every house where the scholars lived in order to awaken the sleepers.<sup>32</sup>

At the beginning of the eighteenth century there were large areas even in the Lowlands where there was no provision for education, and in the Highlands and the northern counties the position was naturally far worse. The Commissioners of the Forfeited Estates included the building of schools in their general plan of reform, and conditions gradually improved. Although the schools might be few and far between, and entirely lacking in equipment, the village schoolmaster sometimes had a high standard of teaching. One school, on the Lovat estate, was described in 1764 as "made of earth and drystone neither wind tight nor water tight"; but in it the dominie managed to teach "not only Latin and Greek, but Reading, Writing, Church Music, Cyphering and Bookkeeping".<sup>33</sup> Comparatively few dominies, unfortunately, were so well qualified.

Lord Lovat had sent his son Archibald to board with the

minister of Petty, at the rate of £12 sterling a year. He paid a further 7s. 6d. a quarter as the schoolmaster's dues, £1 : 1s. as the customary present to the master on the occasion of the annual cock-fight, and 10s. a year for pen, ink and paper.<sup>34</sup> For a real boarding-school he might have had to pay a good deal more. The fees to be charged to the Laird of Gask by a Dunfermline schoolmaster for eight-year-old Laurie, in 1732, were as much as six guineas a quarter, and if the laird wished his son to sleep alone he had to send a chair-bed with him.<sup>35</sup> Outside the boarding-schools the problem of accommodation was not at all easy. Lord Reay, who about that time wanted to send his son to Edinburgh to study law, tried to solve it by writing to Professor Mackie to ask him to find "a private, polite family, where he would have at most but one or two comrades, and a room to himself or at most betwixt two".<sup>36</sup> The trouble was that large numbers of children were sent to Edinburgh to be educated, many of them boarding with private families; consequently, by the second half of the century boarding had become very expensive, and country gentlemen with large families took to living in Edinburgh with their children during term-time.<sup>37</sup>

Some children, including Henry Home, afterwards Lord Kames, were educated at home by a private tutor.<sup>38</sup> But even where a tutor was regularly employed it was quite usual for the boys to be sent to school for part of their education, in the same way that Sir William Hamilton and his brother attended the Glasgow public schools in winter but in summer had a private tutor in the country<sup>39</sup>—hence the need to discuss educational matters at greater length than might be expected in an account of the Scottish home.

In a fairly important country household the tutor would probably be the family chaplain. He was usually a young man studying for the church, or awaiting preferment. His duties were to conduct family worship, to say grace at meals, and to look after the religious instruction of the children and servants. The poor Mess-John, as he was familiarly called, occupied a very lowly position.<sup>40</sup> At meals he ate

his porridge or his broth and boiled mutton at the side table with the children; <sup>41</sup> and the servants were quick to sense his lack of status. (The treatment of chaplains in England was no better; they were expected to leave the dinner-table before the dessert, and were regarded more or less as menials.<sup>42</sup>) The prospects for a young man of normal tastes and ambitions were distinctly uninviting. Consequently, when the Rev. Alexander Carlyle was advised by his father to take a chaplain's post of that kind as the surest means of obtaining a church, he had such a horror of the idea, having seen how some of his friends were treated, that he threatened to give up all thought of clerical work rather than "go into a family", as it was called.<sup>43</sup> There was, perhaps, one redeeming factor: the chaplain-tutor had no need to fear destitution when his pupils grew up; it was quite usual for him to stay on as one of the family.<sup>44</sup>

Sometimes, as in the case of the sons of Mackenzie of Delvine, the tutor accompanied his pupils to school or college. James Morice was with the Mackenzie twins at St. Andrews as their tutor from 1712 until 1716, when they became youthful Masters of Arts. The poor boys, under constant vigilance, could have had very little fun, and it is not surprising that when their elder brother Alexander, who was also at St. Andrews, tried to exert authority over them as well, they were not having any. From the letter which Alexander sent to his father on the subject it seems that boys had pretty much the same attitude to life in 1712 as at the present day: "I . . . shall take the outmost care that I can to cause Kenneth & Thomas ply their book but the true reason that makes them so idle is that they are the best scholars in their class, and if they can say their lessons as well as the rest which they easily do, they content themselves with it and will read no more for me but always tell me when I desire them, that I am not their governour".<sup>45</sup>

It is interesting to see from the reports on Kenneth and Thomas what kind of toil the family tutor exacted from his pupils. In 1707 he wrote to the laird for copies of Aesop's Fables, Lamy's Algebra in French, Plautus's Comedies and



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Wedderburn's Rudiments (by which he probably meant the widely used *Institutiones Grammaticae* of David Wedderburn); he reported that the lads were "advancing in Corderius" and learning the general rules of syntax, and that he was "very well pleas'd with their capacity and inquisitive humor". A year later the twins were still "advancing pleasantly in their studies"; "if they think they've been so diligent as to please me", he writes, "they'll then at night importune me to shew them a Map or to teach them somequhat of Arithmetic; quhich humor of theirs I'm glad to encourage". They were now reading Castellio's *Sacred Dialogues* (later translated as *Youth's Scripture-Remembrancer, or . . . Sacred Stories, by way of familiar dialogues*), Cicero's *Letters*, the *Fables of Phaedrus*, and were beginning Virgil. The reward for good work continued to be still more work. Thus in 1710, "Thomas is now learning the Rule of Three in whole numbers and Kenneth is so far advanced in the Fractions wherein they are exercised at spare hours only as a reward of their diligence quhen they mandate their repetitions timely"—which seems to explain why Alexander's attempts to make them work harder still did not meet with enthusiasm. For the next two or three years they went on with Euclid and algebra, reading Caesar and learning Greek, and in 1714, being in the process of growing up, they spent two hours a day learning the tenor and bass parts of popular airs.<sup>46</sup>

English boys at that time were kept working at Latin and a little Greek; only a small number of schools taught arithmetic or modern subjects. If the Mackenzie children's curriculum was typical of Scottish education there seems to be good reason why Dean Swift, who as a rule hated things Scottish, considered that the lairds gave their sons sounder learning than the wealthier English. It may not have been, but the new business-training academies set up at Perth and elsewhere towards the end of the century were certainly well patronised; they taught such subjects as mathematics, book-keeping, writing, drawing and French.<sup>47</sup>

After the general education, whether carried on privately

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or at school, it was quite common for a laird to send his son to Edinburgh to study law. Henry Home, for instance, was indentured to a Writer to the Signet.<sup>48</sup> It was felt to be a great advantage to a young man destined to inherit large estates to understand the forms of deeds and to be able to transact legal business, both for the management of his private affairs and to fit him for public employment.<sup>49</sup> Sir Alexander Maxwell, indeed, drawing up instructions for the education of his sons, about the year 1728, said: "I speak of Law as of the cheif studie; for tho' he doe not incline to follou the profession of the law, yet it is soe necessar to know for self preservation, a man is at the greatest losse to be ignorant of it".<sup>50</sup> In the earlier part of the century the heirs to great houses, instead of going to Edinburgh, were frequently sent to Holland or Germany to study civil law, and afterwards to France to learn the ways of polite society.<sup>51</sup> But the Rev. Alexander Carlyle, writing about 1765 (when, in fact, Boswell was in Holland studying law), said with regret that the custom had died out: it was now thought more profitable for the future laird to stay at home and learn to manage his estate; but by doing so he acquired neither polished manners nor the art of conversation.<sup>52</sup>

It is true that the growth of industry and commerce in Scotland, as in England, did affect the attitude to education, and encouraged some of the upper class to put their sons to trade rather than to a university. But the belief in the value of a sound educational discipline had by no means died out. Admittedly, there was nothing quite so formidable as the programme of studies which Bishop Burnet drew up in the late seventeenth century for a young Scottish aristocrat, who, by the age of fourteen, was to be proficient in Scripture, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Italian and Spanish, to be followed by anatomy, botany, natural history, mathematics, philosophy, law and agriculture.<sup>53</sup> But the plan of education drawn up towards the end of the eighteenth century by George Dempster for his nephew, then seven years old, was exacting enough. The aim was to help the

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boy to become a good and accomplished Scots country gentleman, and his education was to be carried on mainly in Scotland, so that he would grow to love his country. He was to have a private tutor to accompany him to school and college and to travel with him. Until he was twelve years old he was to attend a grammar school to learn Latin, French, dancing, writing and arithmetic. His holidays were to be spent at Dunnichen, where he would probably live later on, and he was to pass them in riding, shooting, fishing and visiting. The next three years he was to spend at St. Andrews University studying Latin, Greek, French, literature and natural philosophy. During the vacations he was to visit Edinburgh and Glasgow and the northern parts of England and Wales. In his sixteenth year he was to go to Edinburgh University to learn moral philosophy, natural history and civil law, spending the vacation in London and the south of England. In the following year, in addition to attending civil law and other classes, he was to visit Ireland or the Baltic. Finally he was to study for a profession, possibly law, with visits to Europe in the vacations. "By this plan he would become as learned as his capacity would admit of, as good as possible; and always as busy as a bee; and as rich as his parents left him." <sup>54</sup>

Except where they shared their brothers' tutor, girls usually managed to escape most of this educational process. As in England, most of them were taught by their mothers or governesses to read, write, sew and keep accounts. In Scotland the governess had another dreary duty: to hear them repeat psalms and catechisms (or, at the end of the century, a number of hymns from the "Collection", an anthology which most Scottish children were expected to read <sup>55</sup>). This they did for an hour or more every day and nearly all day Sunday.<sup>56</sup> For the rest they were taught little besides social accomplishments such as dancing and music, and those were often deferred until the girls went to a finishing school in Edinburgh, Dumfries, Inverness or elsewhere to learn manners "and be perfited", as Galt's Leddy Grippy put it, "wi' a boarding-school education".

The difficulty was that the governess's own capabilities were seldom of a high order. One candidate for the post in the household of the Lady Thunderton, in 1710, gave as her attainments: "I can sow white and coloured seam; dress head suits, play on the Treble and Gambo, Viol, Virginelles and Manicords, which I can do, but on no other". She asked for thirty pounds a year Scots (equivalent to £2:10s. sterling) with gown and coat, or forty pounds with shoes and linens.<sup>57</sup> Prospective employers mostly expected nothing better. In fact, even seventy years later, Lady Henrietta Nairne, wanting a governess for her nephew's four daughters, was quite impressed with one who simply offered to teach the girls needlework, behaviour, the principles of religion and loyalty, a good carriage, and to talk "tolerable good English" (an unfortunate way of putting it!). Her salary scale showed a peculiar reverse: twelve guineas for the first year and ten guineas thereafter.<sup>58</sup>

The governess's proficiency on the harpsichord or the violin was apt to be rather modest, and parents were well advised to engage an expert for the children. In Edinburgh there was a good choice of music masters, but it was not easy to persuade one to go to an out-of-the-way district. Even the Duchess of Argyll had considerable trouble, as late as 1786, in finding somebody to go to Inveraray to teach her daughter to play the harpsichord: all those of any merit were fully booked up for teaching or public recitals. At last she found one who was "a tolerable Teacher, tho' a very indifferent Performer"; he wanted from 7s. 6d. to 10s. a day, and was willing to eat at the second table.<sup>59</sup>

How a little girl of twelve spent her day may be read in the instructions which Lady Grisell Baillie gave to her daughter's governess in 1705: "Directions for Grisie given May Menzies. To rise by seven a clock and goe about her duty of reading, etc. etc., and be drest to come to Breckfast at nine, to play on the spinnet till eleven, from eleven till twelve to write and read French. At two a clock sow her seam till four, at four learn arithmetic, after that dance and play on the spinet again till six and play herself till supper

and to bed at nine.”<sup>60</sup> Towards the end of the century education consisted mainly, in the experience of another small child, of learning by heart Johnson’s *Dictionary*, memorising not only the meanings of the words but also their exact order. Most of her time was spent in steel contraptions designed to “improve” the figure.<sup>61</sup>

The plain seam which the girls had to sew was apt to be very, very plain. About 1730 Lady Elphinstone, each morning before she got up, is said to have cut out in bed as many men’s shirts as she had daughters, and they had to be finished by bedtime.<sup>62</sup> Needlework was one of the few subjects taught in the Edinburgh finishing schools, and in some it took the form of dressmaking. Knowing that, the Rev. John Mill, of Shetland, hopefully sent his daughter Nell to Edinburgh in 1769 to learn to make her own clothes and see more of the world; she already knew as much about sewing and stocking-knitting as Shetland could teach her.<sup>63</sup> But Nell turned out to be too bright a pupil for her father’s peace of mind; he complained in his diary a few years later that she was “much given to dress, diversions, and encouragement of young frothy men to make suit to her”.<sup>64</sup>

Education in most girls’ boarding-schools, both in England and Scotland, was rather superficial. One can obtain some idea of it from the quarterly accounts sent to the Laird of Kilravock for the education in Edinburgh of his daughter Margaret Rose. He was charged £6 Scots for her quarter’s writing lessons. For the rest the charges were for a set of wax fruits, embroidery satin and similar items, and for the teaching of such accomplishments as singing, playing the virginals and dancing.<sup>65</sup> The girls’ boarding-school at Dyke, in Morayshire, which appears to have taken large numbers of the “young gentlewomen” of the north, did teach reading, writing, arithmetic and plain needlework as well as music,<sup>66</sup> but in general it is not surprising that some mothers preferred to teach their daughters themselves rather than send them to boarding-schools. “In the very best of these houses”, complained

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one parent, "young ladies learn nothing of housewifery; their hours are all devoted to French, dancing, music, and a few trivial ornaments, gumflowers, or embroidery; their manner is reduced to a system of common-place civility, beyond which they cannot go." <sup>67</sup> There was evidently some truth in Galt's description of the typical young lady returned from school, who was qualified only to sew flowers on satin or to spend hours "jingling with that paralytic chattel a spinnet". But things were no better in England or in France; Lady Lucie Stuart, indeed, wrote to her mother complaining that in the Parisian convent to which she had been sent to be educated she was learning nothing but embroidery and purse-making. <sup>68</sup>

In one respect, and it was a very important one, Scottish girls were usually exceedingly well trained. That was in household management. Quite young children were given their little domestic responsibilities and were expected to be ready to take complete charge of the household in case of need. Little Mary Fairfax, at her home in Fife, was not more than seven or eight years old when she was made to be useful, pulling the fruit for preserving, shelling peas and stringing beans, feeding the poultry and looking after the dairy. <sup>69</sup> Housework was none too easy when every country household had to be more or less self-supporting, and it had to be taught systematically. The usual method seems to have been for the daughters to be given complete charge of the household for a week or more at a time. James Nasmyth's sisters in Edinburgh, as soon as they were old enough, were given the keys for a fortnight in turn, together with the household books, and at the end of their time the books were balanced to a farthing. They learnt, in supervising the cooking, to avoid waste and to have meals ready to time; and they gained experience in cleaning, mending and everything else. <sup>70</sup> That was during the closing years of the century, although by then, as a result of the country's increased prosperity, domestic training was beginning to be regarded as rather unfashionable. A critic of Edinburgh life, writing in 1783, said that whereas, twenty years before,

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the daughters of the best families attended sewing-schools and pastry-schools, and went to market with their mothers, now the daughters even of tradespeople would be ashamed to be seen in a market, but spent their mornings at their toilet and their spare time reading novels. The cares of the family were now devolved upon a housekeeper.<sup>71</sup> However, the criticism was only of Edinburgh, and Sir John Sinclair, visiting Prussia in the early nineteenth century, could still say in approval that the young women in that country were brought up "with all the simplicity of the Scotch system of education, being early taught the management of domestic concerns".<sup>72</sup>

The lady of the house might not always have been so ready to trust her daughters with the keys if she had known where her stores were going. In one household in the Hebrides the young ladies, in the course of their weekly turns as housekeeper, surreptitiously kept the Belgian valet of one of the guests supplied with lumps of butter and other luxuries.<sup>73</sup> But it is fairly certain that Sir Alexander Dick's small daughter Janet was innocent of any such offence. In 1760, at the age of eleven, she was left in complete charge of the house at Prestonfield. It was a big responsibility, and one which evidently caused her no little anxiety; but she was able to tell her father when she wrote to him, "Sir I do assure you your housebook is in great order".<sup>74</sup>

To supplement their home training girls were often sent to cookery classes. There were "pastry schools" in Edinburgh and Glasgow similar to the ones run in the early years of the century in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, where young ladies could learn "all sorts of pastry and cookery". In Glasgow, round about 1780, lessons were given by the head cooks of the Saracen's Head and Black Bull inns. Whenever a grand dinner was given at one of the inns a great number attended for instruction, and each paid the cook five shillings to see how the different dishes were prepared, and how the dinner and dessert were placed on the table.<sup>75</sup> Mary Fairfax, when she was staying in Edinburgh about the year 1795, was sent to a pastry-cook every

day for a short lesson. "We were amused at the time", she recalled, "and afterwards made jellies and creams for little supper parties, then in fashion, though, as far as economy went, we might as well have bought them." 76

Incidentally, the girls sometimes enjoyed their classes for reasons of which their mothers might scarcely have approved. At an important county dinner held at Saracen's Head Inn, Glasgow, the gentlemen present were greatly surprised to see fifteen or sixteen elegant young cooks, with white aprons, helping to hand up the dishes and place them on the dinner table. On finding out that the young ladies were simply helping the cook for instruction, a number of the younger men in the party straightway began joking and flirting with them, and finally trooped down to the kitchen themselves to help to carry up the dishes. 77

After their domestic training the daughters were well fitted for marriage, but they had normally to wait for their parents' approval; otherwise there might be trouble. Here, for example, is an announcement from the *Edinburgh Courant* of 28th October 1758: "Glasgow, 23 October, 1758.—We, Robert M'Nair and Jean Holmes, having taken into our consideration the way and manner our daughter Jean acted in her marriage, that she took none of our advice, nor advised us before she married; for which reason we discharged her from our family for more than twelve months; and being afraid that some or other of our family may also presume to marry without duly advising us thereof, we, taking the affair into our serious consideration, hereby discharge all and every one of our children from offering to marry without our special advice and consent first asked and obtained; and if any of our children should propose or pretend to offer marriage to any without, as aforesaid, our advice and consent, they in that case shall be banished from our family twelve months; and if they should go so far as to marry without our advice and consent, in that case they are to be banished from the family seven years. . . ." 78

It would be interesting to know the upshot of this decree.



## Chapter II

### The Home and its Plenishing

Among the professional classes and others who were moderately well off there was no clear-cut division between town- and country-dwellers. That was specially true after about 1760. As we have seen already, the need for educational facilities took many families to Edinburgh for a great part of the year. But there was also a regular outflow from the city: lawyers and business men who were tied to Edinburgh during the week made their escape at the week-end to their farms or villas in the country, turning to rural pursuits as naturally as did any of the landed gentry.<sup>1</sup> In the north, Inverness was the winter residence of many of the Highland gentry, who were attracted there partly by its good schools and partly for its society and amusements.<sup>2</sup> Other Highlanders had their winter homes in Elgin.<sup>3</sup> Almost all the chief families in Ayrshire left their country houses for the whole of the winter months and went to live in Ayr, where they passed their time in routs and assemblies; <sup>4</sup> and so on up and down the country. And it may well be assumed that, among the habitual town-dwellers, the professional classes of Edinburgh were not alone in possessing country houses in which they could spend their Saturdays and Sundays.

Edinburgh already had its housing problem, and was not ready for a large influx from the country. As the demand for accommodation there increased, rents naturally began to soar. So, in 1732, Lord Lovat wrote to his cousin in Edinburgh asking him to find him lodgings for the winter as quickly as possible, before the rush of people made

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them dearer; "but", he added, "when you take them now and for a quarter or four months in the beginning of November you can certainly have them cheaper". He warned his cousin that he did not want "despicable lodgings", but would prefer them near the Tron Kirk; he was tired of the Canongate.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the century there were few houses outside the city gates. Within the gates there were still a fair number built of wood or mud, or stone houses with timber balconies boarded up to increase room and shop accommodation; <sup>6</sup> but what particularly struck visitors to the town was the extreme height of the stone buildings in which most of the population lived (the inevitable result of trying to keep within the city walls, at first through fear of English invasion). The fronts of the houses were nine or ten storeys high, and the backs, on the hill-slope, anything up to fourteen. As one French traveller naïvely remarked: "They take Care to make the Stairs as easy as they can; but let them be never so easy, it must be very inconvenient to lodge in the fourteenth Floor!" <sup>7</sup> Each floor was let to a different family, who shared the dark, narrow staircase open day and night to the street (taking care not to stumble over any vagrants who might be asleep on the stairs), but who felt safe from intruders on shutting their own private doors.<sup>8</sup> They were little short of slum conditions, but they were common to Paris, Madrid and many other European towns. In fact, according to Adam Smith, it was only in England that the term "dwelling-house" signified everything under the same roof; elsewhere it was frequently applied to a single storey.<sup>9</sup>

Sir John Sinclair, visiting Paris in 1785, was surprised to find that the people of rank did not congregate in one part of the town, but were scattered all over it.<sup>10</sup> But the same might have been said not long before of Edinburgh; rich and poor congregated under the same roof. Whereas in London tenement-houses the lower floors were considered the best, in the tall Edinburgh houses the fifth storeys were the ones regularly taken by the "best" people, while the

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higher and lower floors were occupied by the working classes.<sup>11</sup> As in present-day Edinburgh, the lowest floors of all were often used as shops ; and the commodities sold there were then advertised in glaring colours on the outside walls.<sup>12</sup>

Living conditions inside the flats were very cramped. The poll tax returns of the late seventeenth century give abundant evidence of overcrowding, with large families living with their servants in a few rooms and perhaps putting up relations as well.<sup>13</sup> It was a long time before things improved. Even as late as 1760 an eminent lawyer was living with his wife and children in four rooms—parlour, consulting-room for his clients, bedroom and kitchen. The children, with their maid, had beds made up for them at night in the father's room. The housemaid slept under the kitchen dresser, and the manservant had to sleep out. For such highly inconvenient accommodation as that the rent was about £15 sterling a year.<sup>14</sup>

Houses in the New Town were altogether different. The rent there was £100 or more, but for that the tenant could have a house to himself, large and airy, and built in the best English style.<sup>15</sup> As soon as the houses became available the New Town became the fashionable quarter, and people in high society gradually deserted the old tenements. But the eighteenth century was drawing to its close before the move was completed. The reason for the slow development was said to be that much of the best building land round Edinburgh had been acquired by the Corporation, which refused to allow it to be built upon lest the value of the houses in the Old Town should fall, to the great loss of their owners <sup>16</sup> (some of whom, one suspects, were themselves members of the Corporation).

In Glasgow, too, most families lived in flats, but the tenements were on fewer floors than those in Edinburgh. Edward Burt described it as " the prettiest and most uniform town " he had seen.<sup>17</sup> About the year 1735 a few individuals began to build their own houses, but the change was slow, and by 1760 only a small number were ready for occupation. Much later than that most of even the wealthiest inhabitants

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were still sharing houses and managing with only one common living-room to a family.<sup>18</sup> It is quite likely that they were not attracted by the self-contained houses which were being put up. Professor Reid, who acquired a new one in 1764, found it none too spacious: "You go through a long, dark, abominably nasty entry", he wrote to a friend, "which leads you into a neat little close. You walk up stairs to a neat little dining-room, and find as many other little rooms as just accommodate my family so scantily that my apartment is a closet of six feet by eight or nine off the dining-room."<sup>19</sup> Two storeys of a large tenement house which were advertised about that time sound rather more attractive: each "storey" contained a kitchen and eight rooms with fireplaces, and two large cellars and a garret; the rooms and passages were all well lighted, and several of the rooms were large and lofty; and—a great convenience—in the close there was a private well with very fine soft water.<sup>20</sup>

By about 1780 Glasgow houses were becoming more pretentious. One desirable residence contained thirteen rooms with fireplaces, with light and dark closets. In the kitchen there was "a remarkably fine well, the water greatly superior to any in the neighbourhood". Among the other amenities were a stable, byre, laundry, gardener's room, washing-house, chaise house, poultry house and "a little Dovecot, stocked". There was an acre of garden, with over a hundred fruit trees and all kinds of vegetables, and a canal well stocked with fish.<sup>21</sup> Many of the modern houses had in addition a brew-house at the back for the manufacture of home-made ales.<sup>22</sup> House rents were anything from £1 : 10s. to £60 a year.<sup>23</sup>

The new houses were elegant in a way, but to a southern visitor they looked unfinished: the doors and window-shutters were of unpainted deal, and many of the walls showed bare plaster.<sup>24</sup> But by then most of the richer inhabitants had their country houses to which they retired for a large part of the year, coming into town for only a short time in the morning to do their business,<sup>25</sup> and they

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quite likely regarded their Glasgow houses as temporary lodgings rather than as real homes. A favourite retreat for Glasgow merchants was Wemyss Bay. There a number of them had built a terrace of white houses with a lawn spreading in front of them to the banks of the Clyde. With wooded hills in the background and gay flower-beds in the front they were a delightful change in summer from the busy city streets.<sup>26</sup>

While Glasgow itself was growing as the town of the well-to-do, the villages near by were expanding to accommodate the working classes. Nearly five hundred small houses were built within a few years, at rents ranging in general from £2 to £5 a year; some were only 15s.<sup>27</sup>

Although several of the older Scottish towns had grown, like the old towns of England and the Continent, with narrow, irregular streets, most of the burghs had been built to a general plan of one main street with other streets branching off at right angles.<sup>28</sup> Mrs. Calderwood must have been thinking of some such town as those on her memorable visit to Brussels, in 1756: "Whereas we show our knowledge of mathematicks, by casting all our buildings into exact squares", she wrote, "they choise to show theirs by variety of angles; not one corner is of the same angle with another. Whenever a street makes a turn, sweep go about the houses built upon it, as if it had been turned after they were all set; but, however foolish-like it looks on paper, it does not appear so ill to the eye."<sup>29</sup> But what Mrs. Calderwood considered the regular lay-out of Scottish streets seemed to some of the visitors to the country to be rather the exception. Wesley, in 1770, while greatly impressed with the new streets in Arbroath, which ran parallel to one another, said that he had seen no other town in Scotland built with so much common sense.<sup>30</sup>

For a real conglomeration of houses, High Street, Dumbarton, must have been a remarkable sight. All types were represented. "One reared his domicile close upon the footway—probably covered it with the overhanging storey—while another left a vacancy of ten or fifteen feet

to the front ; here was a low fantastic cottage, there a house lofty and severely plain ; one dwelling had its gable to the street, the front of another ran parallel to it ; a third was entered by a staircase in the inside, and a fourth by a flight of stone steps outside.”<sup>31</sup> The only characteristics which most of them had in common, it seems, were thatched roofs and tiny windows.

There is no point in describing here the special types of architecture to be found in all the various towns of Scotland. Each town seems to have had its own distinct individuality. Perth, it is true, bore a certain resemblance to Edinburgh : the houses were very high, most of them being divided into flats and holding anything up to fourteen families ;<sup>32</sup> and, in accordance with the common practice, they had an outside staircase (the “forestair”) leading from the street to the first-floor flat.<sup>33</sup> To get to the ground floor one had usually to climb up the forestair to an upper floor and then walk down a flight of stairs inside the house ; but in Inverness, where the ground-floor rooms were shops or warehouses, there was no communication at all between them and the upper floors. (To make this independence clear to all, the outer walls of the upper storeys often bore the initials of the owner and his wife.<sup>34</sup>) Quaintest of all, in the eyes of tourists, was Dunfermline, with its stone steps projecting so far into the street that they nearly met those of the opposite houses. The upper floors to which they led were built of timber and roofed with heather and furze. Beneath the stairs there were bunks for swine, fowls and dogs, and at the foot of them immense middens were piled up<sup>35</sup>—picturesque, perhaps, but scarcely hygienic.

As far as there was a typical Scottish house in Lowland country districts, it was a very plain, square-built structure with a centre doorway and narrow windows. That was the style, for instance, of the houses occupied by Ayrshire farmers and some of the smaller lairds. They were comfortable, though not elegant ;<sup>36</sup> but their rather dreary appearance from the outside was usually relieved by overhanging clumps of trees and fairly extensive gardens. There

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was normally one main living-room where the family had their meals, slept, did their work and chatted with the neighbours who dropped in for the evening. Its social centre was the common fireplace, which for the greater part of the century was large and open and surrounded, beneath the great wide chimney, with seats for family and guests; but in later years it was spoilt from that point of view by being fitted with an iron grate (though rarely with an oven). Roughly hewn boughs formed a not unattractive ceiling, and the space between them and the roof proper was floored with brushwood covered with dried moss or grass. The resulting attic made a useful storeroom; or, if the main living-room would hold no more beds, an extra bedroom, the entrance to it being by way of a ladder and a trap door.

Behind the living-room was the "spence", or parlour, where the housewife put the best furniture and kept the Sunday clothes, and, on great occasions, received company. A passage known as the "through-gang" joined the living-room to the cow-house and stable (a rather doubtful advantage). In addition there were usually a few out-houses: a barn, a cart-shed and some kind of a shed for peat and lumber.

The more prosperous people sometimes added a second storey to contain the best bedroom. A two-storey house would have a slate roof (the rest were thatched);<sup>37</sup> and whereas the house on one floor cost only between £10 and £20 to build, the second storey raised the expense to anything between £100 and £180.<sup>38</sup>

All this looks unpretentious enough. But when in 1803 the Schoolmaster's Act ordered heritors to build houses for their schoolmasters, which houses need not contain more than two rooms including the kitchen, there was a great outcry: the majority of lairds were indignant at having to erect "palaces for dominies".<sup>39</sup> It was a strange attitude for them to take up. If the schoolmaster had a family it is difficult to understand how he could study at all in such cramped quarters. One social reformer, blessed with

imagination, had seen the difficulty so far as the clergy were concerned, and argued, almost plausibly, that the remedy lay in an extension of the enclosure movement. He invited the harassed minister, at his wits' end to find some quiet spot where he might think out his sermon, to consider how wonderful it would be if he could go out and sit under a hedge well away from the house and work in peace: "For sure, when the Weather is fair, their little Manse-houses are not so fit for their Studies, as these delightful Inclosures under an Hedge are. There they don't hear, nor are disturbed, nor diverted by Childrens crying, the Mistriss and Servants speaking loud about their little domestick Affairs; from which Noise, no Room in his House is remote enough." 40

In comparison with the ordinary homes, some of the country seats of the nobility were magnificent. One of them, the Earl of Hopetoun's seat, a few miles from Linlithgow, is described as a freestone building to which were added two semicircular wings, four storeys high, adorned with pillars and pilasters. The vestibule, supported by pillars, led into a large marble hall from which opened a drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom and spacious saloon. The centre staircase was decorated, from top to bottom, with representations of the heathen gods, and over the dining-room fireplace was a large picture of Noah and his family offering up sacrifice for their deliverance from the Flood.<sup>41</sup> The Earl of Bute's house at Mountstuart is also described as having a main body, of considerable frontage, and two wings. On the ground floor were a long breakfast-room and a drawing-room (both overlooking an extensive lawn), a spacious dining-room and a library. The bedrooms were upstairs, and the wings accommodated the various offices.<sup>42</sup> Another fine structure, Blair Castle, the seat of the Duke of Atholl, is said to have three dining-rooms and three drawing-rooms, besides bedrooms and servants' offices; also, sad to say, "one room designed for his Study, but never used." 43 There were many of these impressive mansions, some of them designed by William Adam, father of the celebrated brothers.



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In 1705 the Earl of Rosebery bought a sixteenth-century three-storey house—Rosebery House, Inverkeithing; and by 1711 he had had a new wing ("the new jamm") added at the back.<sup>44</sup> It became quite the fashion to add new wings and extra storeys to existing mansions or to build entirely new ones; and towards the end of the century several of the landed gentry employed an artist to advise on the choice of sites, or to plan alterations of old houses so as to preserve their character and yet adapt them to modern conditions.<sup>45</sup>

The buildings most difficult to modernise were the old fortresses, ranging from simple residential towers to extensive castles, which were still occupied in large numbers, particularly in the Highlands and the Border counties. The towers were solid structures rising to a height of forty or fifty feet, with walls at least five feet thick. The thickness of some of the walls, as in Comlongon Castle in Dumfriesshire, was as much as thirteen feet, and it was fairly common to provide mural chambers, serving as bedclosets or wardrobes. The towers contained at least two floors above the basement, and usually more. Extra accommodation could be provided by building further storeys or by adding turrets at the corners; or a wing could be thrown out at one side, turning the tower into an L-shaped mansion (after the style of the Frenchland Tower, near Moffat).<sup>46</sup> The castle proper was planned to accommodate a greater number of people, either in the main building or close by. From early times the castle itself, a private residence equipped for defence, was reserved for the chief's own family and for intimate friends. Other branches of the clan lived in smaller buildings round the castle, and the servants' houses formed an outer ring again.<sup>47</sup> One way of providing more room for the family was to build an extension to the castle, in the way that Crathes Castle, in the Dee Valley, had a large three-storeyed addition made to the mediaeval structure, with a new doorway and entrance hall, a wide staircase, a drawing-room and spacious bedroom.<sup>48</sup>

The great problem, in adding to an older building, was to

avoid a patchwork effect. A particularly happy solution was found at Gordon Castle, in the north, by making the new building separate from the old. To connect them the builder added a long covered passage, which the family decorated with pots of lupins, sweet peas, mignonette, or whatever flowers were in season, and which was kept brilliantly lighted at night.<sup>49</sup>

What a castle looked like after piecemeal additions had been made may be gathered from Sir Archibald Grant's description of the state of Monymusk, Aberdeenshire, in 1716: "The house was an old castle, with battlements, and six different roofs of various hights [*sic*] and directions, confusedly and inconveniently combined, and all rotten, with two wings more modern, of two stories only, the half of windowes of the higher rising above the roofs, with granaries, stables, and houses for all cattle, and of the vermine attending them, close adjoining". The surrounding farm houses, school and other buildings, "all poor dirty hutts", were pulled to pieces from time to time (or fell of their own accord) and were used for manure.<sup>50</sup>

The style of most of the houses in Great Britain inevitably depended on the kinds of building materials found locally or transported without difficulty. That meant that the new houses built in England in the eighteenth century were of stone where it was cheap and bricks in the clay lands; where there was nothing but mud they had to be made of wattle and daub. On the whole, houses were worse as one went farther north, until in parts of Wales and Scotland they were almost incredibly bad.<sup>51</sup> There were cottages in Dorset with mud walls made of road-scrappings, it is true, and turf houses still existed in Surrey and Hampshire; but the difficulties of finding building materials in even the most remote districts of England must have been light compared with those of the Highlands and Western Isles.

A survey published in 1738 stated that Scotland abounded in quarries of freestone for building, in grey slates ordinarily used for covering houses, and in blue slates used for the better type of house. There were also quarries, "nay,

Mountains " of marble, some white, with veins of several colours, and some green, with veins of red and other colours.<sup>52</sup> But they were unequally distributed. In the Islands and most parts of the Highlands there was no brick, and very little wood. Stone might be plentiful enough in places, but it was difficult to dress. It was decidedly easier and cheaper to throw up some sort of hovel of turf and thatch.

Highland houses, therefore, were often as primitive as they could be. Where there was any wood, creel houses were built, formed of wooden posts interlaced with branches of trees, and covered on the outside with turf.<sup>53</sup> But, speaking generally, there were three types of house in the Highlands and Islands: the black house, the white house, and a " kind of white house ", as it was described at the time. The genuine black house was built entirely of turf—walls and roof as well; if its roof was thatched it was known as a " good black house ". The true white house consisted of masonry and slate. A " kind of white house " was one which was covered with thatch.<sup>54</sup>

One type of house quite commonly built in the Highlands was about a hundred feet long. The walls were of stone for three feet up, and built up to ten feet with layers of turf; and the whole structure was thatched with heather. The house was divided into several parts. The first, called the chamber, had a small glazed window on the south side and a bed (reserved for guests) let into the partition dividing the room from the next; it constituted the family living-room. Opening out of it was a bedroom for the younger members of the family. Next again was the parents' bedroom. The last division but one was the servants' hall, a room with boarded windows, and usually with a peat fire kindled on an old mill-stone in the centre of the room, under a hole in the roof. The last fifty feet or so formed the cow-house.<sup>55</sup>

Few Highland cottages had chimneys. The fire usually burnt on a centre hearth of the kind common in England until the end of the fifteenth century, and the smoke escaped (if at all) by way of a hole in the roof. The hole

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was made a little to one side, so that the rain would not put out the fire; but on a wet day the smoke tended to damp down and fill the room. It was rather amusing that Smollett should complain in 1763 of the chimneys in France, so wide that they let in both rain and sun and smoked intolerably,<sup>56</sup> for that was almost precisely what Dr. Johnson said about those in the Highlands and western islands of Scotland ten years later.<sup>57</sup> The people who clung to the old ways argued that smoke acted as a fumigant against fever; when it was drawn straight through a chimney into the open air germs took possession and the household fell ill.<sup>58</sup> But probably most people, even if they believed in such a theory, would have been ready to take the risk.

Sometimes the hut was divided into only three apartments—cow-house, kitchen and spence. The partitions between them did not go right to the roof, so there was a free passage for light from one end of the house to the other; and anyone lying in bed could drowsily watch the reflection of the kitchen fire playing on the beams and rafters.<sup>59</sup>

Primitive though they were, it is surprising to find that the turf-built houses, with their centre fireplaces, were described in 1704 as "of much such building as those at Dullwich-wells near London".<sup>60</sup> But there was a worse type still. In the Isle of Mull, in the late eighteenth century, the widely scattered houses were built of irregular blocks of basaltes. The walls were several feet thick but seldom more than five feet tall, and the entrance was only three feet high. The more wealthy islanders showed their position by having a door across the entrance, but most of the inhabitants did without. The roof might be covered with flat pieces of stone spread with turf; or it might have thatch fastened down with long ropes of heath, the thatch being removed every year for the soot it contained, and used as manure. In either case there was a hole in the roof to let out the smoke from the centre fireplace. The whole arrangement may have been snug enough, but a much-

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travelled French visitor decided that the Eskimos and Laplanders were much better as house-builders.<sup>61</sup>

In the first half of the century Highland gentlemen quite commonly lived in the veriest hovels. There was not always even a partition to divide the hut: a gentleman's family and his cattle might simply occupy opposite ends of it.<sup>62</sup> But by the time of Dr. Johnson's visit, in 1773, the lairds and their families were usually living in small houses,<sup>63</sup> leaving the more primitive dwellings to their labourers. The alterations being undertaken in castles and mansions were only part of a general improvement in housing conditions. About 1750, for instance, the dwellings in Rannoch, Perthshire, were huts which could only be entered on all fours, and in which it was impossible to stand upright. Fifty years later they had almost entirely given way to comfortable houses built of stone.<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere, too, improvements made by "gentlemen of taste and public spirit" contributed considerably to the health and comfort of the tenants.<sup>65</sup> In order that a troublesome neighbour might easily be removed, letting was sometimes limited to a year at a time.<sup>66</sup>

There was one thing in favour of mud huts: they cost nothing in repairs. Some of the old mansions could have a small fortune spent on them. That was why Sir Archibald Grant, puzzled to know how he was going to make his Monymusk home fit to live in, was advised by an expert to pull it down and use the materials to build "a little comodius house . . . what I call a 500 pound house". £500 laid out on a "clean handsom house", they agreed, would give more satisfaction than £800 spent on the old one, besides the cost of maintaining "such a prodigious confused rooffe".<sup>67</sup> That was in 1719. By the end of the century costs were higher and tastes were less simple. In consequence the charges for repairs and additions to Dunvegan Castle, in the Isle of Skye, in the year 1790 came to roughly £3940. They included some £783 for building a new wing, £96 for new windows in the old buildings, £1384 for repairing the old tower, £21 for

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rain-water pipes, £27 for ornamental ceilings throughout the house and £8 for a new grate.<sup>68</sup>

Lead pipes and gutter spouts seem to have caused just as much bother as they do nowadays; burst pipes provided plenty of work for the local handy-man. In addition, there were incidental and less urgent jobs, such as mending a window "towards keeping out ye doves from house",<sup>69</sup> and, in Viscount Macduff's house at Banff, turning the lead eagle's head on one of the spouts because it looked the same way as another one. In that particular case the plumber agreed to accept a dump of old tin in part payment.<sup>70</sup> His lordship showed a keen interest in such trifling details. In fact, more than one householder, enjoying the novel experience of having workmen in, seems to have been itching to help. A Roxburgh minister, the Rev. George Ridpath, who had masons in to repair his window-frames, admitted in his diary that on 1st August 1759 he "attended workmen a great part of the day". Two days later he was "still chiefly attending workmen and doing some little things with putty"<sup>71</sup>—making himself a thorough nuisance, perhaps, but obviously having a good time.

As time went on gentlemen were less inclined to be satisfied with the "little comodus house" recommended to Sir Archibald Grant. The house which was described as the most splendid urban mansion in Scotland, built in Glasgow about 1780, cost its owner £10,000,<sup>72</sup> a tremendous sum for those days. The craze for building, in fact, caused some people to spend more than they could afford: they accepted the architect's estimate of what it would cost to build a fine mansion and forgot all about the extra expense of laying out the gardens and buying suitable furniture.<sup>73</sup> Such was the sad case of Dr. James M'Nair of Glasgow. He set out to build himself a villa on the outskirts of the town, and began by erecting the out-houses; but finding them likely to turn out so expensive that he would not be able to finish the job he altered them into a quaint château which his neighbours promptly nicknamed "M'Nair's Folly";<sup>74</sup> and there he lived.

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Improvements in interior decoration did not keep pace with the rest ; but Scotland seems to have been no worse in that respect than most parts of Europe. According to one writer, the insides of houses were properly finished off only in the Dominions (with the exception of Scotland). In the Low Countries, and indeed in every other European country, rooms had neither wainscot nor ceiling. The floor-boards of the room above could be seen lying across the rafters, which were sometimes oiled or covered with pitch to make them durable and give them a better colour.<sup>75</sup> So in Scotland : until late in the century ceilings were rarely plastered, and the single boards served for floor and ceiling. The effect was not unsightly, but it might be inconvenient : the floor-boards often had holes in them about an inch across, through which a cord had been threaded to tie them together during transit. The holes were plugged when the boards were put in position, but the plugs tended to drop out. The result was that the inquisitive occupants of an upstairs flat could spy at their ease upon the family below.<sup>76</sup> (The great houses, of course, such as Earlshall, Pinkie House and Bruce's House at Culross, with their fine timber ceilings painted with heraldic and other devices, fall into quite a different category.)

Floors as well as walls had usually to be provided from local materials. Most of the specifications for new cottages in England called for stone, brick or tiled ones ; others were roughly made of earth. So, too, in the Highlands the mud or turf houses had floors of bare earth, and when the rain came in (as it often did), and the ground became sodden, the long-suffering housewife had to lay down heaps of turf to make a dry pathway from the door to the fireplace and from the fireplace to the bed.<sup>77</sup> There was obviously no use for a carpet. Even in the Lowlands the lairds' houses often had earthen floors, or perhaps a compost of clay, smithy ashes and lime, beaten together and well smoothed ; but in the superior ones they were laid with bricks, or more frequently with flat slaty stones laid loosely together, and now and then, as things improved, with freestone slabs

carefully hewn and fitted to each other.<sup>78</sup> There seems to be no trace of the pleasant Swedish custom of strewing the floors with little sprigs of juniper,<sup>79</sup> but the practice of covering them with rushes or bent grass had not long died out—if, indeed, it were not still continued by old-fashioned families.

Not many people used carpets on the floors until late in the century. (The word “carpet” still normally signified a tablecloth.) Consequently, in the better houses, which had wooden flooring, the maids had to work hard at waxing and polishing until the floors were as slippery as glass.<sup>80</sup>

Some of the larger houses had tapestry wall-hangings, which were said “to keep out draughts and spiders”; but probably it could be said of many of them, as it was of those in the Low Countries, that they had been up for so many generations that it could scarcely be told whether they were of cloth, tapestry or leather.<sup>81</sup> More frequently, round about 1720, the walls were of whitened plaster. A little later on panelling became fashionable—panels of three to four feet wide and from six to eight feet high. For the best Edinburgh houses the decorators imported Danzig timber specially for the purpose; it was of finer grain and freer from knots than any other wood available.<sup>82</sup>

Wallpaper was coming into fashion early in the century, and was welcomed as a novelty. From about 1730 onwards painted paper was made in Edinburgh, at first in two colours only, at a shilling a piece of twelve yards. The designers gradually introduced varied colours and patterns, so that fairly soon it could be said that the papers made in Edinburgh were as good as those sent from England.<sup>83</sup> But it was to London that Bailie John Steuart of Inverness wrote in 1750 for “12 piece of painted paper for 2 rooms” in his house.<sup>84</sup> He was not the only one interested in paper-hanging at that time. One of the most enthusiastic, the Rev. Dr. Hugh Blair of Edinburgh, was said to be “as eager about a new paper to his wife’s drawing-room . . . as about a new tragedy or a new epic poem”.<sup>85</sup>

A more expensive style was to have the walls painted.



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Sir John Foulis had his best room painted white, with black-bordered japanned panels and on them "pictures of flowers, men, etc., and gilded". The picture frames were japanned with flowers of all kinds.<sup>86</sup> It was an idea which caught on among the well-to-do, especially among the rising magnates of Glasgow. A typical house belonging to one of them had the dining-room walls ornamented with bunches of grapes and the drawing-room ones painted with landscapes and festoons of flowers.<sup>87</sup> These wall-pictures were the early form of Scottish landscape-painting.

But there were more important household problems under discussion than the question of paper or paint—windows, for example. Of all the disparaging comments which Dr. Johnson thought fit to pass on his travels in Scotland, few were so ill received as his condemnation of "Scotch" windows. While he was staying at an inn in Banff he had difficulty with one of the new sash windows, and, according to Boswell, he based all his criticisms on that one experience. "He that would have his window open", Johnson complained, "must hold it with his hand, unless, what may be sometimes found among good contrivers, there be a nail which he may stick into a hole, to keep it from falling. What cannot be done without some uncommon trouble or particular expedient, will not often be done at all. The incommodiousness of the Scotch windows keeps them very closely shut. The necessity of ventilating human habitations has not yet been found by our northern neighbours; and even in houses well built and elegantly furnished, a stranger may be sometimes forgiven, if he allows himself to wish for fresher air."<sup>88</sup> Boswell, in defence, pointed out that his learned friend thought nothing of standing before an open window on the coldest day or night. "It may do with his constitution," he grumbled; "but most people, amongst whom I am one, would say, with the frogs in the fable, 'This may be sport to you; but it is death to us'."<sup>89</sup>

Actually Johnson seems to have had fairly good grounds for his remark. The early sashed windows were not very successful. The houses in Dunsyre, Lanark, for instance,

were said in 1791 to be very badly ventilated: the windows had formerly had movable timber leaves in the bottom half, according to the usual arrangement, and glass above; now the windows were sashed and scarcely any of them could be opened.<sup>90</sup> The same was true of Walston, in the same county.<sup>91</sup> Add to that the opinion of Sir John Sinclair that in Holland "the windows are too large and numerous, which makes their houses cold in winter",<sup>92</sup> and one begins to suspect that "Scotch" houses were perhaps a trifle stuffy.

Windows which would not open were, at all events, proof against burglars. Whether or not door-fastenings were equally secure is a moot point. Edward Burt, in the Highlands about 1730, described the locks on the doors there as being made of wood, but so skilfully cut that only their own wooden keys would open them.<sup>93</sup> But the editor of his letters says that doors were closed simply by a latch or wooden bolt which anybody could have opened with a cheap clasp-knife; <sup>94</sup> and that seems to have been the case elsewhere, except that an anxious householder might draw a wooden bar across his outer door for extra safety.<sup>95</sup> As it happened, there was a strict etiquette among thieves. In the Highlands, where people trustingly kept their clothes, cheese and other stores in open sheds, and left their linen bleaching in the open country at all hours, theft was almost unknown.<sup>96</sup> In one district of Fife, on the other hand, there was a period when almost every house was burgled. The thieves were caught at last and taken before Lord Balcarres, who asked them how it was that they had never been to his house. "My lord", they replied, "we often did,—everywhere else we found closed doors, but at Balcarres they stood always open, and, where such is the case, it is a rule among us not to enter".<sup>97</sup>

A visitor who did not find the door open and could not make himself heard by "tirling at the pin" would have to rap with his knuckles or knock with his staff. A contemporary writer said that quite late in the century he had never seen a knocker or bell on any door.<sup>98</sup>

Two useful features quite near the door are still to be

seen in some parts of England as well as in Scotland. Almost every house in town or country had a stone seat, often covered with turf, projecting from the front wall; and there the members of the family would sit and greet their friends as they passed by. The other construction was the "loupin'-on-stane", or mounting-block, which was made either of wood or stone.<sup>99</sup>

So much for the actual structure of the house. Its plenishing (to use the good Scots word) was usually equally simple, and confined very largely to local manufactures.

In the Highland cottages anything ornate would have been quite out of place, but anything rougher than actually existed there would be difficult to find. In the western districts the seats and beds (which were sometimes one and the same) were in the early years of the century simply banks of earth, built close to the fire and turfed over.<sup>100</sup> The black houses of the Hebrides were no better provided: for the next hundred years or more they had a special seat for the men of the household at one side of the centre fire, consisting of a plank supported by two piles of turf or by two stones. The wife did sometimes have her own three-legged stool, but the children had to crouch by the fireside with the dogs. The beds, standing at one end of the living-room, were nothing but four rough wooden posts bound together by narrow side-pieces on which rested a wooden bottom, which was covered with loose straw. There were sometimes other beds in the barn, one or two of them being reserved for guests.<sup>101</sup> In spite of their well-deserved reputation for hospitality, the Highlanders always kept to their own seats and beds, and never gave them up to any visitor whatsoever.<sup>102</sup>

The house of MacNab, at Dalmally, consisted of a hut buried several feet in the earth to keep out the cold. It was described in the late eighteenth century as being "supplied with every thing requisite to form a comfortable dwelling". There were two rooms. The main one, the "chamber of presence", had a peat fire in the centre, and round it,

coming down from the roof to within four feet of the ground and three feet from the walls, a kind of wainscoting, forming a warm enclosure within the room. There were wooden benches set round the inside of it. The other room contained the stores : some sacks of barley and oatmeal ; some bottles of whisky ; a linen-press, which also contained several Highland dresses for holiday use ; some simple dairy utensils ; and, piled up against the walls, a stack of peats.<sup>103</sup> One can only remark that standards of comfort have changed.

The simple furniture of the Highland houses was often made by a travelling carpenter, who stayed in the house until his work was done. The same thing happened in parts of the Lowlands which were difficult of access and had no local handy-man. The ordinary small house in country districts of southern Scotland took little fitting up : it had in the living-room a bed or two, a sideboard and pot-shelf (covered with an array of trenchers and other simple utensils), a form or a few chairs, a looking-glass, a table, a few stools and not much else.<sup>104</sup>

There was usually no great urgency for the householder to have furniture made ; he had enough already, of a good, solid kind, for everyday needs. Previous generations might not have been able to leave their descendants comfortable easy chairs, commodious wardrobes, clocks or other luxuries, but they had gathered together the bare minimum, at least, of serviceable chairs, tables, chests and beds. The seventeenth century had seen a definite advance in furniture design. Some of the bigger houses, in consequence, had acquired elegant cabinets and tables of walnut, with upholstered chairs, mirrors and even, perhaps, a pair of virginals or some other musical instrument.<sup>105</sup> With such provision some of the lairds of the early eighteenth century had to be content. Those who wanted the new mahogany furniture, and could afford it, had to order it from London ; the Edinburgh furnishing business was in too poor a way to deal in it. But in the new prosperity after about 1760 upholsterers from London found it worth while to open shops in Edinburgh.<sup>106</sup>

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In the meantime, some of the contemporary inventories of furniture made dreary reading. What a depressing picture, for instance, we get from the list of the Countess Marischal's furniture in 1722! Her main room had in it a canvas-bottomed bed with roof; a canopy bed; a big oval table "wanting a peice of the leiffe"; twenty-five rush chairs, "two of them armed, but one wants ane arme"; "two closs boxes, one of them broke"; two frames of old rush chairs; an old broken stand; "four pillars or tressts of ane old black table", and other similar oddments. Another room contained simply a big oak press, the frame of an old bed, a box-bed, "a chisst of drawers", a wire press, and a square stand or little table. The kitchen had an old washing-board, a cupboard, and the foot of an old box-bed; and so on, throughout the house.<sup>107</sup> Most of the items were obviously relics of better days. However, shabbiness did not matter overmuch so long as the little homely touches were there—"a walking chair for the bairns", perhaps, or a small "handy" to wash them in, a spinning-wheel with its set of bobbins, and all the "boats" and other things needed for salting salmon, preparing the meals and generally making life comfortable.<sup>108</sup>

Where there was an artistic housewife the barest of rooms could be made attractive. So, in the north, although the large hall at Cawdor contained in 1716 only an iron grate, a map of the world, two pictures, twelve carpet chairs and a large arm-chair, the best room was decorated in fine style. It had arras hangings, a bed with "courteins of red velvet covered with red flowered camlet, and lined with white Persian tafety", six velvet chairs also covered with "flowered camlet" and a japanned cabinet. The "purple room" had blue hangings and a bed with purple cloth curtains lined with yellow Persian "tafety" "with a quilt conform", eight "graft stick chairs" and two pictures. The tower hall was hung with orange drugget, and its bed had curtains of orange cloth lined with linen.<sup>109</sup> The furniture was simple, but there was evidently somebody there with an eye for colour.

The early eighteenth-century mania for oriental furniture (black ornamented with gilt) may not have been so pronounced in Scotland as it was in England, but by 1708 the Laird of Thunderton, in Moray, had acquired several pieces. His furniture may perhaps be regarded as typical of that of the man of taste. His "strypt room", for example, had "camlet hangings and curtains, feather bed and bolster, two pillows, five pair blankets, and an English blanket, a green and white cover, a blew and white chamber-pot, a blue and white bason, a black jopand table and two looking glasses, a jopand tee table with a tee-pot and plate and nine cups and nine dyshes and a tee silver spoon, two glass sconces, two little bowles with a leam stoop and a pewter head, eight black ken chairs with eight silk cushens conform, an easie chair with a big cushen, a jopand cabinet with a walnut tree stand, a grate, shuffle, tonges and brush; in the closet, three pieces of paper hangings, a chamber box with a pewter pan therein, and a brush for cloaths".<sup>110</sup> Those were early days for teapots and tea-tables in Scotland, and wall-paper was not yet made there.

Lady Grisell Baillie also liked comfortable furniture, and her accounts for the year 1703 show that she spent £4:4s. Scots (7s. sterling) on "a rush bottomd eassi chair", £18 on "a big bufft eassi chair with cushion", and £7 for making seven cushions. One of her easy chairs, it seems, was still too hard, for four years later she bought for it an extra stone of down.

Humble as were the ordinary household utensils in Scotland at that time they seem to have been better than those obtainable in some Continental towns. In fact, a Scottish lady living in Hanover wrote home to her sister to send her all kinds of goods (from beds to shovels and tongs) which she said were poor in Hanover and very dear.<sup>111</sup>

In the course of time people became more ambitious. Critics said of Dunfermline about 1770 (what, incidentally, others had said of England over half a century before)<sup>112</sup> that a newly married couple there no longer thought the house complete without a clock and a chest of drawers, and

that the guid-man must now have a watch.<sup>113</sup> Where they could be obtained (particularly in Edinburgh and other easily accessible districts), mahogany tea-tables and dining-room suites were now all the fashion.<sup>114</sup> But in the north the Doune, at Rôthiemurchus, had apparently only just reached the stage of japanned toilet-tables and other japanned ware, and most of the rooms were rather sparsely furnished.<sup>115</sup> It is impossible to generalise; communications were still too bad for anything like standardisation to develop. And Sir Robert Burnett's parlour at Crathes, Aberdeen, probably went on for some time longer furnished simply with two tables, a closet-box, two bird-cages, one chair, a clock, two big spinning-wheels, a wash-stand, a chamber-pot and a water-bucket and -jug! <sup>116</sup>

Whatever the position as regards furniture, there was seldom any shortage of linen. In gentlemen's families it was usual to have clean table-cloths every day, and napkins were always provided as well.<sup>117</sup> Housewives high and low spent much of their spare time at the spinning-wheel, and saw to it that their daughters and servants did the same; and their efforts kept the local weavers well supplied. In the more remote districts the linen might be of plain weave, but even there the housewife would have a good stock. Whether, in the less fashionable home, she ever chose to use it was another matter. One recalls a certain lady of fiction, a Mrs. MacClarty, to whom it was suggested that her linen was too fine for common use. "For common use!" cried Mrs. MacClarty; "na, na, we're no sic fools as put our napery to use! I have a dozen tableclaiiths in that press, thirty years old, that were never laid upon a table." <sup>118</sup>

Those who were within easy reach of Dunfermline could buy fine damask ready-made.<sup>119</sup> Others were able to buy Flemish and Dutch diaper and damask, which disdainful critics accused them of preferring not because they were better but because they were foreign; <sup>120</sup> but by about 1770 housewives accepted the Edinburgh weave as better than any which could be imported.<sup>121</sup> Very intricate some of the weaves were, and in a wide range of patterns: the rose

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knot, the lavender knot, the "dice about", the "Walls of Troy", the "rose and dice about", "burdseye", and "several knots odd",<sup>122</sup> to mention a few of them. Some families had their napkins and table-cloths specially woven to include their own crests. In the big houses the stocks were sometimes enormous. In 1760, for instance, there were piled up in Crathes Castle thirty-four and a half dozen table napkins and eighty-six table cloths, valued, respectively, at £6:14:6 and £14:16:6.<sup>123</sup>

The rest of the table appointments were not always in keeping with the fine linen. In the early eighteenth century both English and Scottish families still had wooden trenchers for common use (although by then pewter was fashionable), and the fashion changed very gradually to rough pottery made of coarse clay, followed, before 1750, by white-enamelled "delft ware" prettily decorated with blue.<sup>124</sup> China plates (and later on silver ones) were for very best use only. Even as late as 1750 thrifty households throughout Scotland used wooden platters on all informal occasions. Pretentious three o'clock dinners were a different matter, and for them the mistress would proudly bring out her pewter dishes for the first course and her china ones for the second.<sup>125</sup>

In earlier times it had been usual in England for a couple sitting together to eat from one trencher. In Galloway and other parts, even as late as the eighteenth century, economy went further: the whole family ate out of the same wooden dish.<sup>126</sup> But by then that was rather a mark of poverty, and in most districts the better-off people had enough plates to go round. In 1731 Sir Archibald Grant had seventy-five of them, although unfortunately there were "severale crackt".<sup>127</sup> So we may hope that it was mutual affection, or perhaps a love of tradition, which made the old Duke and Duchess of Hamilton go on sharing the same plate as they sat on the dais at meal times,<sup>128</sup> and not simply shortage of crockery.

Besides plates, there were several other table articles formerly made of wood (chiefly ash) and only gradually



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giving place to pewter or china. The trouble was that although pewter was durable it was difficult to keep bright, besides which households already possessing timber utensils would be unlikely to throw them away, although on public occasions they would naturally show off their best table-ware. For ordinary meals they would go on using their wooden cogs, the large bowls used for porridge or kail; their bickers (smaller than cogs but not exactly tiny) from which the thirsty drank their ale; their ale-caups, which were the wooden mugs, holding about half a pint, used by the more abstemious; and their luggies, mugs so called because they had an upright lug or ear.<sup>129</sup>

For a century or more all the regular types of dishes and bowls had been obtainable in pewter, but the difficulty was to get them delivered. With roads so bad, it was natural to fall back on household utensils which could be made by a local carpenter. People living in Edinburgh or near to the coast were better able to keep in fashion; and it was easy, as early as 1704, for the Laird of Kilravock to order from an Edinburgh pewterer a number of pewter broth-plates and copper stewing-pans, with instructions to forward them "in John Duncan's veshel to Inverness".<sup>130</sup> China-ware would travel by the same means, but it was not so easy to carry it over rough roads and deliver it intact. There was good reason to keep chipped plates and mugs with broken handles so long as they could be used at all. Even Sir Archibald Grant's tea-table china had suffered a number of accidents before it was listed in 1731: "Twenty-four saucers, twenty-two cups, two tea-pots with two stands, two milk pots with one stand, two sugar dishes with covers and one stand, two slop basins, two boats for spoons, six coffee dishes (the handle of one broken)".<sup>131</sup>

By about 1750 no polite household was complete without its china punch-bowls and teacups and saucers displayed conspicuously in a dining-room cupboard.<sup>132</sup> Some of the punch-bowls were eighteen inches across and held four gallons. The manufacture of fine china had already made considerable progress, and from 1748 onwards there were

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potteries in Glasgow, Prestonpans, Portobello and other centres.<sup>133</sup> A fair proportion of their output found its way to Scottish homes. That was why Mrs. Calderwood, critical lady, was so disgusted on her visit to Holland in 1756 to find people still using mugs, jugs, teapots and everything else made of "puther",<sup>134</sup> although the Dutch had long been noted for their delft ware.

Drinking-glasses were scarce, and (as in England) a single glass might go round the whole company.<sup>135</sup> A writer in the 'nineties, trying to show how sober the people of Banff had become of recent years, said that in 1748 a joyous company after dinner might have been seen quaffing the wine of a dozen bottles from a single glass, whereas in 1798 a party would sometimes use a dozen glasses for their single bottle.<sup>136</sup> It was still usual to pour ale and beer into pewter tankards, and spirits into a pewter toss, or tass. Some of the tosses had a cup at each end: a large one for a big dram and a small one for a little dram (they stood on either end).<sup>137</sup> But in the Highlands whisky was sometimes served in an ordinary sea-shell.<sup>138</sup>

Until after 1750 it was said to be advisable for anyone going on a journey, or to a wedding reception or a public dinner, to carry a knife and fork in his pocket; <sup>139</sup> there might be none provided. (The custom of carrying a knife continued still later in France; <sup>140</sup> but Smollett said, rather scornfully, that knives were not really needed there, because the meat was always boiled or roasted to rags.) <sup>141</sup> In Galloway, in the early eighteenth century, everybody dipped into the common dish with his own short-hafted "mun", a horn spoon; and after using it he put it in his pocket or hung it by his side. There were no knives or forks in those parts for ordinary use, so people used their fingers instead.<sup>142</sup> So, too, in other districts, such as St. Vigeans, Angus, where in 1754 there were not three farmers in the parish who had half a dozen knives and forks in their houses. However, forty years later nearly every house had them.<sup>143</sup>

Highlandmen carried a knife, and sometimes a fork as well, on their persons.<sup>144</sup> Dr. Johnson, knowing that, was

curious to know what the women did, and learnt that some of them had a knife and fork too, which they carried in their reticules. But usually the men cut their own meat and then handed their knives and forks to the women : and they themselves ate with their fingers.<sup>145</sup>

There was a shortage at one time in England as well. A book of table manners published in 1703 advised the diner to wipe his knife on his napkin (implying that there was only one provided) and not on his bread or on the tablecloth. If he were squeamish he could wash his spoon in the basin on the sideboard ; for "some people are so curious that they will not endure a spoon to be used in two several dishes".<sup>146</sup> It looks, indeed, as if in regard to cutlery Scotland was not far behind. Ayrshire was famous for its breakfast knives, with their blades of best metal set in tortoiseshell, or stained horn, "girt with silver virlets",<sup>147</sup> and the people in Edinburgh who would be likely to read a manual of etiquette already had stocks of silver knives, forks and spoons. By 1760 Sir Robert Burnett's household in north-east Scotland could boast of "1½ dozen silver hafted knives and forks, 4 little silver knives, 17 silver spoons and a big one, 40 knives, 42 forks, 14 breakfast knives".<sup>148</sup> (Silver teaspoons cost about 10s. 6d. sterling for half a dozen, as compared with 1s. 6d. for horn ones, or pewter.)<sup>149</sup>

The table appointments included as a rule a hand-bell for summoning the servants. Actually, when the family were alone and dined upstairs (as they often did) they were apt to be too impatient for such polite ceremony, and somebody would knock loudly on the floor with the poker instead, or thump with the heel of his shoe.<sup>150</sup>

The dining-rooms of the larger houses might be used only rarely for meals, but they *were* used, where there was no picture gallery, to house the family portraits. During the first half of the century people seem to have taken a keen interest in their likenesses but to have cared little for landscape paintings. The Countess Marischal, for example, had sixty-one pictures, and the fifty-one which were listed

in her inventory of 1722 were all portraits.<sup>151</sup> Her collection was typical of many. One of the portrait-painters with a long waiting-list was Sir John Medina, who died in 1710. He used to travel about the country to visit his clients, and, being a busy man, he saved time by taking with him a collection of canvases on which he had already painted some suitable types of bodies, ready dressed, to which he had only to add the heads;<sup>152</sup> if some of his subjects appeared more shapely than in real life they were unlikely to complain. Medina's successors as portrait-painters, William Aikman and Allan Ramsay, both left Edinburgh for richer opportunities in London.

The cost of portraits varied considerably. In 1722 Sir Archibald Campbell, of Cawdor, paid an Edinburgh artist £10:5s. for two;<sup>153</sup> but in the following year James Balfour of Pilrig, near Edinburgh, paid £10 each for pictures of himself and his wife. These, apparently, were not very successful, and in due course were moved to the attic; and a third, of the laird's brother, when last heard of was being used as a door to the henhouse.<sup>154</sup> A similar fate might well have befallen the three "coarse representations of humanity" produced by a certain Mr. Watt for Kilravock, at thirty shillings each, but nobody cared to take them down.<sup>155</sup>

Later in the century interest in art was a little revived. The eminence of Henry Raeburn as a portrait-painter gave rise to a new generation of portraits to hang beside their ancestors. And at last popular taste broke away to the new form of art as seen in the landscapes of Alexander Nasmyth and others, which, to begin with, were painted directly on the wall, usually above the fireplace. That gave an opportunity for clearing away the worst of the ancestral pictures. Unfortunately, some housewives were rather too zealous, causing Lord Fife to complain (in the preface to the catalogue of his pictures), "Old portraits . . . are often thrown out of houses for lumber . . . or are sold to pay debts, or to make way for the modern fashion of papering rooms. I know many houses, where very fine Portraits are

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put up to Garrets and neglected, while their places are supplied with an eightpenny paper.”<sup>156</sup>

Musical instruments were in steady demand. There were several kinds to be had, as we can see from the announcement in 1707 that an Edinburgh musical instrument maker “makes the Violin, Base Violin, Tenor Violin, the Viol de Gambo, the Lute Quiver, the Trumpet Marine, the Harp; and mendeth and putteth in order and stringeth all those instruments as fine as any man whatsoever in the three kingdoms, or elsewhere, and mendeth the Virginal, Spinnat, and Harpsichord”.<sup>157</sup> Perhaps it was to him that Lady Grisell Baillie paid 15s. 6d. a time to tune her spinet and virginals.

For people in distant parts of Scotland it was easier to send their daughters to Edinburgh to learn music than it was, when they came home, to provide them with a spinet to play on. When Lord Lovat was arranging with his Edinburgh factor to send his daughter home to Beaufort, in 1743, he wrote: “If there be an occasion of a good ship coming from Inverness I would have her spinet put up in a strong box and sent by sea”.<sup>158</sup> There was apparently some difficulty about that, for in the following year he said: “I have fallen upon an excellent method for bringing north the spinet. I have a strong fellow, a servant in my labourings that speaks the language and I resolve to send him south to carry the spinet north on his back. He will buckle it across his shoulders and tye it on with ropes like a pedlars pack.” The frame could come north on the side of a horse, he thought; or, if not, the local wright could make a new one.<sup>159</sup>

Spinets were fairly common, but Sir Robert Burnett of Leys (from whose inventory we have already quoted) went one better; in 1760 he was the proud possessor of an organ, “valued by Mr. Tate” at £6:6s. A few years earlier John Broadwood, a Scottish carpenter and joiner, had gone to London, where he later on helped to design the new pianoforte; and soon after 1780 pianos began to arrive in Edinburgh and Glasgow. From that time the old spinets

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and harpsichords began to fall out of favour: they were knocked down in auction rooms in great numbers for a few shillings each, mainly to farmers, who used them for the double purpose of musical instruments and sideboards.<sup>160</sup> But the new technique could not be acquired all at once, and fourteen-year-old Mary Fairfax, perhaps in protest at having to practise on her new piano, used to thump so hard that she broke the strings; "but", she says, "I learned to tune a piano and mend the strings, as there was no tuner at Burntisland".<sup>161</sup>

The reception rooms were quite often bedrooms as well. In the cramped quarters of Edinburgh Old Town there were few rooms which did not contain a bed, either openly or behind a screen; and in Inverness, in 1745, there was only one house in which there was a room without a bed.<sup>162</sup> It was not only in the towns that sleeping accommodation was so makeshift: in the castles of the western Highlands, too, the great hall was used in the daytime as a dining-room, but at night it was the bedchamber of the gentlemen dependants of the family, who had a dozen or so beds made up against the walls.<sup>163</sup> Not only did the bedrooms encroach upon the living-rooms but the reverse was also common. In the early eighteenth century, country gentlemen in Lowland districts used the dining-room only on ceremonial occasions; they lived mostly in the family bed-chamber, and received their friends and neighbours there as a matter of course.<sup>164</sup> Glasgow people, too, even the wealthiest of them, through the greater part of the century seldom used the dining-room, but had their meals in a bedroom; and the wife regularly entertained friends there for the "four hours" (the forerunner of afternoon tea).<sup>165</sup>

This custom explains why the inventories of bedroom furniture list such an otherwise unnecessary number of chairs. In 1731 Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk had six mahogany ones and two foot-stools in his best bedroom, as well as a bed lined with green silk, a bolster and two pillows, a pair of blankets and an under-blanket, two window-hangings, a pier-glass, an imitation marble table

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with a leather cover, an Indian chest containing four pairs of sheets, four pillow-cases, two table-cloths and six napkins (all old and much used), two pairs of blankets, a grate, fender, tongs, poker, shovel, bellows and brush, a clothes-brush and a close stool.<sup>166</sup> And Sir Robert Burnett had three easy chairs and six little ones in his "new bedroom", in 1760, and a card-table as well; it was obviously more than a mere sleeping-apartment.

Stocks of bed-linen were usually good. The housewife kept it folded away in presses in various parts of the house; the nursery press alone belonging to one Moray family contained twenty-six pairs of sheets of various qualities, besides fourteen holland pillow-slips and twenty-eight linen ones, and six linen top sheets.

Countrywomen normally spun their own yarn for bed-linen, but in the shopping centres (such as there were) that was unnecessary. So, although Lady Grisell Baillie kept her maids at Mellerstain hard at work on their spinning, her household book shows that while she was in Edinburgh she bought some of her bed-linen ready-made, and that she also bought large quantities of sheeting and calico by the yard. Between 1703 and 1707 she spent £44 Scots (£3:13:4 sterling) on calico for lining a bed, £14 Scots for two pairs of sheets for the children's beds and twelve pillow-slips, £51 for linen for sheets and £3:9:8 for bleaching fifty ells of linen. She also bought twenty-nine ells of "harden" (common linen or the coarsest quality of hemp or flax) "for bed and horse sheits", at a cost of £7:10s.; but what unlucky person was to lie in them was not clear; she had already spent £7 on two pairs of sheets for the servants—half the price of those she bought for the children.

As long ago as 1598 an English visitor to Edinburgh had written, "They use but one sheet, open at the sides and top, but close at the feet, and so doubled",<sup>167</sup> and in the late eighteenth century beds were still described as being made that way "universally in Scotland".<sup>168</sup> The writer should, perhaps, have excepted the Highlands, where people

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did not always use sheets at all,<sup>169</sup> but wrapped themselves in plaids or blankets.

The tradition that blankets should be white was not yet established. Some fine fingering ones in use in Rossie, Angus, in 1739 were parti-coloured (scarlet and green, and red, green and black), and one large pair was "sewed all round scarlet and green".<sup>170</sup> English blankets were almost unknown in Scotland, although in the more easily accessible districts a few people had them. Sir Robert Burnett's house had three English ones to a bed or four Scottish ones; but that was in addition to a down mattress and a feather one, or to two feather ones, or to a feather one and a chaff one. It looks as if the members of his household slept, in the continental fashion, under a feather or down bed (presumably the forerunner of the modern eiderdown). It was by no means a general custom in Scotland, for various Scottish visitors to Germany, Scandinavia and elsewhere complained of feeling smothered in the foreign beds.<sup>171</sup>

Bedding, like everything else, had usually to be made of the materials available locally. It was easy enough to provide feather beds and pillows in north-east coastal districts, or in Orkney, where there were vast numbers of sea-birds. In Ayrshire, on the other hand, feather beds were almost unknown, except in the wealthiest households. There were no mattresses. People slept either upon straw smoothly spread out, with a sheet above it, upon the boards which generally formed the bottom of the bed, or upon a large tick bag filled with chaff. The pillows and bolsters were also filled with chaff. The blankets were of wool spun in the house and woven locally. The coverlet, similarly made, was heavy, and sometimes greasy and smelling of oil; or else there was a patchwork quilt which the housewife and her friends had made in spare moments.<sup>172</sup> Quilts elsewhere varied from the Lanarkshire counterpanes manufactured from the coarser kinds of cotton yarn<sup>173</sup> to the ones peculiar to Shetland, known as rugs, which were made from different coloured worsteds sewn in patterns on a coarse ground, sometimes in imitation of carpets. The rugs



cost from 16s. to two guineas each, according to their pattern and colouring.<sup>174</sup>

Fynes Moryson, speaking of his visit to Scotland in 1598, described the bedsteads there as being "like Cubbards in the wall, with doores to be opened and shut at pleasure".<sup>175</sup> Beds of the same kind were still common in the eighteenth century<sup>176</sup> (and can actually be seen now not only in parts of Scotland but also in Holland and Brittany). They were built against the wall, boarded round with deal and finished off, as neatly as a cupboard, with sliding doors of the same material;<sup>177</sup> they must have been stuffy in the extreme, but at the same time a welcome refuge from the draughts which prevailed in winter in ill-constructed houses. In the day-time, no doubt, it was convenient to be able to hide a dishevelled bed behind such a tidy exterior (and dishevelled it was likely to be, for it was impossible to tuck in the clothes on the far side without using a bedstaff).<sup>178</sup> The parlour of the manse of Creich, near Dornoch, was said to look very attractive with its long rows of presses and beds with wooden shutters painted blue, running along the full length of one wall.<sup>179</sup> No doubt the occupant could have left the shutters open at night (and perhaps the original designer intended him to do so); but it seems that he seldom did,<sup>180</sup> but preferred to lie, in oyster-like seclusion, in his "clos kaissit bed, lokkit and bandit".<sup>181</sup> What is more, it was quite a normal procedure for two guests hitherto unknown to each other to be asked to share a bed.<sup>182</sup>

In the best houses these beds were lined with white calico or some coloured material which could be renewed from time to time. Otherwise they sometimes got into such a dirty, bug-ridden state that the only remedy was to throw the whole of the woodwork into the street and make a bonfire of it<sup>183</sup>—an occurrence so frequent in some of the towns that people apparently thought nothing of it.

The nobility, from the beginning of the century, usually had a few "standing" beds, or four-posters, in addition to the closed variety. The four-poster was the fashionable bed of the period, and one reads much of its hangings of

richly coloured silks or of bright linen. Underneath there was sometimes a truckle couch, to be drawn out at night for the use of a servant.

The four-poster beds in the Highlands and western isles, such as there were, often had curtains of tartan or plaid. But Highlanders in general would have scorned such a bed. Most of them slept on the ground, on fern or heath covered with a blanket, and whenever they were given a real bed to sleep in they pulled off all the bedclothes and lay on it simply covered with their plaids. Heath, arranged roots downward, was almost as soft as feathers, and gave out a pleasant scent.<sup>184</sup> By the end of the century the inhabitants of the Isle of Mull had made little cribs round the sides of the room to hold their heath beds; and above each bed, as the height of luxury, they had built a kind of shelf, covered with turf, to hold lumber and also to prevent the rain which fell through the roof from falling on the sleeper.<sup>185</sup> But by that time people in Perthshire and elsewhere were beginning to give up their heather or fern beds in favour of standing ones with plenty of blankets.<sup>186</sup>

As the living-rooms differed in number and size, so, too, did the outhouses. They might range from a laundry, brew-house, bakehouse, slaughter-house and dairy to a single barn. The large estates had also their coach-houses and stables, usually in the park, some distance away from the house. In addition, every nobleman's house had what were called the "mains", where the grooms, stable-hands and outdoor labourers lived.<sup>187</sup> How the indoor servants fared in the matter of accommodation we must leave until later on.

The normal methods of heating and lighting varied between one district and another. We are reminded of that by Donald Sage's account of a holiday he spent as a child in the north of Scotland, and of the delight with which he sat by the parlour fire and watched "the substance which burnt so brilliantly, and sent forth so strong a heat from a low iron grate in the chimney. When it burned, it melted like resin or sealing wax, and every particle of it which lay

untouched by the fire shone like so many pieces of polished iron." The answer to his eager questions was that it was English coal, which was used in England instead of peat.<sup>188</sup>

There were actually several coal-burning areas in Scotland; and it was equally true that there were large tracts of England in which no coal was to be had at all. In London, certainly, coal was the regular fuel, while the surrounding villagers used coal to mix with the sticks which they picked up locally. But farther afield, in places fourteen miles or more away from the city, coal could not be obtained unless some form of water transport was available; people had to burn wood, bracken or furze, or whatever they could find.<sup>189</sup> There was the same difficulty in Scotland.

It was the transport problem again. There was enough coal being mined in Scotland, even in those days, to supply the whole population; but the difficulty and expense of carrying it from Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Fife and the coal-mining districts round the Firth of Forth, except by sea, were often prohibitive. Some Highland lairds did manage to have coal fires, it is true, but only with considerable trouble. They sent their retainers down to the Lowlands in hundreds to bring home supplies, each of them carrying a small tumbril of primitive design which held about twenty stone.<sup>190</sup> It is obvious that all but the more influential Highland families would have to look for some other type of fuel.

It was easy enough to carry coal by sea. The result was that, while people in parts of Scotland never saw any, the inhabitants of certain districts of Holland burnt nothing but coal from the Scottish mines. It made a far better fire than the turf which they would otherwise have had to burn, and was actually cheaper, when the prohibitive cost of transporting turf was taken into consideration.<sup>191</sup> In 1713 Scottish coals were being sold in London, too—"the best that have come to London for many Years, and out of the Earl of Marrs Colliary".<sup>192</sup>

Coastal areas of Scotland naturally fared better than some parts of the interior. Great quantities of Lothian coal

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were exported from the Forth to different parts of the kingdom.<sup>193</sup> By 1751 coal was being brought by sea even so far as the northern estate of Kilravock—a mixed delivery of “two deall and six hundred weight Scotch coal, at 16s. per deal; and twenty barrels Newcastle coal, at 20d. per barrel”.<sup>194</sup> That was the first year in which the Rose family bought coal, which may be why, being uncertain whether English or Scottish was the better, they decided to try both. Inland households had less choice in the matter. It was not until about 1785 that a writer on Aberdeenshire could mention, as a matter of interest, that “some of the gentry burn coals in their houses”.<sup>195</sup> Much depended, of course, on whether there was any other kind of fuel to be had locally. If there was not, as at Stranraer, where there was very little to burn at all, people would give almost any price for coal. It was brought by sea from Ayr or Irvine, and was so expensive (about 1s. 2d. a herring-barrel) that a family having a fire regularly in the kitchen and parlour had to spend six or seven guineas a year on fuel alone.<sup>196</sup>

The price of coal at the pits, about the year 1790, ranged from 1s. 9d. to 3s. 6d. for a cart of 9 cwt. To consumers in the north and, in fact, in any district involving a sea journey, the price was greatly increased not only by the cost of carriage but also by a tax on sea-borne coal. As a result, coal delivered in Inveraray and elsewhere was almost as dear as that sold in London.<sup>197</sup>

The Glasgow householder, at least, had no cause for complaint. In the 'seventies it could be claimed that no place in the world was better supplied with fuel. Coals of very good quality cost only 2s. 8d. a cart of 9 cwt.<sup>198</sup> But the rapidly growing population demanded increasing quantities, and consequently forced up the price by 1799 to 6s. 6d. a cart (which then, however, contained 12 cwt.).<sup>199</sup>

The price in Edinburgh was a little higher: in 1769 it was 5d. or 6d. a cwt.<sup>200</sup> Lady Grisell Baillie, who spent much of her time in Edinburgh at the beginning of the century, was a regular purchaser of “lods colls”, buying sometimes a hundred loads at a time, for £60 Scots (£5

sterling). Lady Grisell kept a watchful eye on her fuel, as indeed she did on all her stores, and warned the housekeeper to "keep the kye of the coles house but when it is wanted to get out coals, but be sur it be always lockt at night, that the Turf stack be not tred down but burnt even forward. Let them fill all their places with coals at once, that the kye be not left in the door." <sup>201</sup>

Even in the districts where coal was moderately cheap some people rather grudged the amount they had to spend on it, and when Lord Fife was in Germany in 1765 he took a particular interest in the household fuel which he saw there, which seemed to him excellent and yet cheap. It was a mixture of one-third small coal and two-thirds clay, the clay being made wet and mixed with the coal and then formed into blocks—if not the modern style of briquette, at least something very similar. He wrote straight away to his factor suggesting that, with Scottish coal the price it was, it would be a good idea to mix it in the German method with clay from the Banff district. <sup>202</sup> We are not told what the factor thought of the idea, or whether he carried it out.

The only fuel obtainable in the Highlands in large quantities was peat. The great drawback to using it was that between twenty and forty loads were required to take the place of one load of coal. Sixty loads of peat made up a "leet" fourteen feet square and seven feet high; and in Moray and elsewhere it was the custom for each tenant to supply a number of leets according to the size of his holding, or, in default, to pay at the rate of £10 Scots for each leet. <sup>203</sup> It was an irksome duty, but an ardent agricultural reformer who was bent on abolishing labour dues admitted that it would be impossible for a gentleman to keep his household provided with peat without this help from his tenants; "Wherefore", he said, "I am afraid my Farmer must serve his Landlord in Firing as formerly". <sup>204</sup>

After digging the peat from a depth of one foot to six (the best being nearest the surface), the tenant or his labourer had the additional task of cutting it into squares and piling it up by the side of the house to dry. Generally

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it was used on an open hearth, but it burnt quite satisfactorily in a grate.<sup>205</sup> For peat to burn well it had to be perfectly dry, and on that account a wet summer spelt disaster. One of the worst experiences was in 1792: rain fell almost incessantly throughout the spring and summer, causing a general scarcity of fuel in the Highlands. There was hardly a single day fine enough for the peats to be cut, and, when cut, there was no possible way of drying them.<sup>206</sup> After another wet season, five years later, many people had to burn their furniture (already scanty) in order to cook their food.<sup>207</sup>

Although there was plenty of peat in the Highlands and western islands as a whole, it was not evenly distributed. Iona and Muck were two islands in which there was none at all. In some of the others the labour of cutting and carrying it was so great that it would have been cheaper to import coal; but currency was scarce, and there was no commodity to offer in exchange.<sup>208</sup> Elsewhere, too, where peat had to be brought from a distance (as in Aberdeenshire) it was expensive,<sup>209</sup> and in Aberdeen itself the amount spent on it in a year was as much as £3000 or even £4000 sterling.<sup>210</sup> All the more fortunate, therefore, were the inhabitants of districts such as Linton, Tweeddale, in which every household in the village had the privilege of cutting peat from the common mosses, and the whole expenses did not amount to more than 8d. for a cartload.<sup>211</sup>

Where there was neither coal nor peat, life was apt to be difficult. One town, Cromarty, became a byword for its lack of fuel. By about 1740 the local mosses had been exhausted, and there was no wood. It was sometimes possible to bring in peat by boat, but the supply was precarious and insufficient. The inhabitants, for want of anything else, used to buy the heath on the neighbouring hill, in patches of a hundred square yards; and at times they were reduced to burning the dried dung of their cattle. All over the country the words "a Cromarty fire" came to be used to denote a fire which had just gone out. But there was a happy solution: an enterprising merchant,

about the year 1745, opened up a flourishing trade with Newcastle, and English coal became the staple fuel.<sup>212</sup>

Those who could indulge in a blazing wood fire would be quite unconcerned at any lack of peat. Where the roads were moderately good, trees could be felled and drawn along by horses; but there were parts of the Highlands where, for lack of roads or water transport, the bark was the only part of the wood which could be sent to market, and the rest had to be left to rot on the ground.<sup>213</sup> And the Scottish wood fire did not always blaze. Dorothy Wordsworth's travels took her into more than one smoky hut where there was no fuel but green wood and no bellows but the housewife's breath,<sup>214</sup> and where, in consequence, the chance of a hot drink seemed depressingly remote.

Those who had to use heath for firing found it fairly good. They cut it off with about an inch deep of soil, turned it upside down, and left it to dry in the sun.<sup>215</sup> Turf, too, which people in the Dumfries district had to burn, was reasonably satisfactory; but it had the slight drawback that the smoke turned their complexions yellow.<sup>216</sup> None of the fuel substitutes quite took the place of a fire of coal or wood—not even the broom which was specially grown for use as fuel round about Montrose,<sup>217</sup> and most certainly not the cow-dung, barley-straw and seaweed which the housewives of Heiskir, one of the western isles, had to use.<sup>218</sup> Elsewhere, in parts of the counties of Inverness, Banff and Aberdeen, where the scarcity was greater still, depopulation was the inevitable result.<sup>219</sup>

It may well be believed that, once a kitchen fire of a slow-burning fuel was started, great care was taken not to let it go out. The country maid who chanced to oversleep and got up too late to catch the last flicker was well advised to set off with a bucket to the nearest house to beg enough fire to rekindle her own.<sup>220</sup>

In Edinburgh there was a great demand for firelighters, known as spunks—pieces of stick about six inches long, smeared at both ends with brimstone. They were sold by hawkers, with loads of them on their backs, who climbed

the long flights of stairs calling, "Ony spunks the day, mistress? a ha'penny the piece or three a penny".<sup>221</sup> Lighting them called for skilful use of the tinder-box; there were as yet no matches.

The Dutch had a method of heating which one would have thought equally suitable for Scotland. Both men and women had portable stoves: little square wooden boxes containing a small earthen pan with a bit of lighted turf inside. The stoves had holes in the tops, and people used them as warm footstools, carrying them to church and everywhere they went.<sup>222</sup> Strangely enough, Scottish visitors to the Continent seemed to agree in disliking the stoves they found there, criticising them as being too warm and suffocating. But in due course stoves were introduced into Scotland, and special ornamental ones were installed in the hall of Inveraray Castle, in the form of large bronze vases on pedestals.<sup>223</sup>

Towards the end of the century there was at least one attempt at central heating. There is a passage in one of George Dempster's letters, written in 1794, in which he speaks of "a curious experiment I am trying at Dunnichen—to heat the saloon, dining room, drawing room, and principal bed chambers, by means of an oven that bakes the air and diffuses it in tubes thro' all the house. Our cotton mill here is warmed in that way. One oven bakes more air than is sufficient in half an hour to make a story of the mill too hot for human habitation."<sup>224</sup> The experiment seems to have been unsuccessful: in 1808 the rooms were being heated by Franklyn's stoves.

While searching for fuel in the turf-bogs the people of Perthshire and other Highland areas frequently dug up roots of fir. They were admirable for firewood and also for light.<sup>225</sup> Many people, throughout the Highlands, used "fir candles", as they were sometimes called, as their ordinary form of lighting, and it was sometimes one of the labour dues of a tenant to deliver a load of this candle fir.<sup>226</sup> The practice was to cut the roots into thin splinters and dry them in a kelchin hung up inside the chimney. They were then ready to use as torches, the turpentine in them



blazing readily and giving an excellent light.<sup>227</sup> One was usually sufficient to light up a room,<sup>228</sup> and it was the job of the youngest member of the party to hold it aloft for the benefit of the rest.

It must have been an arm-aching, dreary business holding the torch throughout the evening, and any beggar who came to the door must have been hailed with delight for the relief he was to bring. It was the custom to make use of vagrants to hold the light in return for food and alms. That was why, when the young people rebelled against being used as candlesticks, the inanimate holders which took their place were called "peermen" (derived from "puirmen"). The earliest form of peerman was a stout staff about three feet long, inserted in a large stone, and having a piece of split iron at the upper end for holding the fir-splinter. Later forms were made of iron, with hinges, and were similar to those used for rushlights.<sup>229</sup>

Fir roots could also be burnt in a kind of lamp. It consisted of an iron shovel, bent towards the bottom, and suspended in the chimney-corner by means of a long handle. Somebody had to sit close to the lamp and replenish the shovel constantly from the pile of fir chunks by his side; <sup>230</sup> and the result was a bright flame mixed with a good deal of smoke.

Oil-lamps were a little less trouble (although the housewife might find the oil itself difficult to obtain). One of the most primitive, frequently used in coastal districts, consisted of a shell hung on a hook near the fireplace. It was filled with oil, and gave light by a wick formed of a rush pith.<sup>231</sup>

The ordinary oil-lamp was the *crusie*, a lamp of French origin <sup>232</sup> which was also used, to a smaller extent, in England. It has been estimated that there were millions of them in Scotland.<sup>233</sup> They were made by the village blacksmiths, who kept a stone *crusie*-mould at the smithy door. The *crusies* were similar in form to the Roman lamp, except that they had a second open vessel placed under the other to catch the drippings of the oil. The wick was a soft, round cord projecting from a lip at one side. Fish or animal oil was used (the inhabitants of Mull used herrings

for the purpose), giving an unsteady flame and a somewhat unpleasant smell.<sup>234</sup>

Rushlights were another cheap and satisfactory form of light in common use in Scotland as well as in England. A single rush burnt for about an hour, and a pound and a half of rushes would last a family all the year round. Five and a half hours of comfortable light could be obtained for a farthing.<sup>235</sup> It was not so brilliant, admittedly, as some of the other kinds, but neither was it accompanied by an offensive smell nor by suffocating smoke. The best lights of all were wax candles. Balls and receptions owed much of their splendour to the hundreds which lighted the rooms. But, except for parties, the housewife tended to be sparing in the use of candles, whether they were of wax or the more humble tallow. To see the lengths to which economy was sometimes carried one has only to read Elizabeth Grant's recollections of her childhood at Rothiemurchus. She and her sisters had to get up at 6.30 A.M. even in winter. They were not allowed any candles at all, which meant that they had to lay their clothes ready to hand when they went to bed. And they had to begin the day by practising on the two pianos and the harp, for the simple reason that they could play scales in the dark.<sup>236</sup>

At times of special rejoicing all such niggardliness went to the winds. After the victory of the Nile, indeed, Greenock and Port Glasgow were so illuminated as to be seen "blazing through the trees, and on the opposite shore the Town of Helensburgh was like one great lamp. This roused his Grace [the Duke of Argyll], who desired his candle chest should be opened, and that nothing might be spared of a combustible nature, except the Castle itself. . . . In a short time, the Castle, with the assistance of potatoes and turnips in place of clay, was highly illuminated, and people at a distance say it made a very grand appearance. On the opposite point, Mr. Buchanan's house of Ardenconnel was next lighted up, and, last of all, Lady Augusta [Clavering] took the hint and lighted up Ardencaple."<sup>237</sup> It would take many weeks of economy to make up so reckless a display.

## Chapter III

# The Garden

The type of gardening so popular in England in the early eighteenth century had a certain vogue in Scotland. It was characterised by its serpentine walks, its miniature waterfalls, grottoes and other conceits; and by bridges, temples and pagodas, showing the new craze for things Chinese. One such garden, at Drumore, in East Lothian, was so full of mazes and wildernesses that it took two hours or more to walk round it, although the whole area was only about five acres. But before long the fashion changed. People grew tired of endless walks lined by trim hedges; and by the end of the century there was nothing to be seen of the former wildernesses except an occasional yew bush which had been spared in rooting up the old hedges.<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, until the "return to nature" movement of the second half of the century, Scottish gardeners continued the strictly formal type of culture which had been customary in England in the time of Charles II, and which many English people still preferred to the newer landscape effects. It depended on exact mathematical calculations. "Make all the Buildings and Plantings ly so about the House", ran the standard Scottish manual, "as that the House may be the Centre; all the Walks, Trees and Hedges running to the House. As the Sun is the Centre of this World, as the Heart of the Man is the Centre of the Man, as the Nose the Centre of the Face; and as it is unseemly to see a Man wanting a Leg, an Arm, &c. or his Nose standing at one Side the Face, or not streight, or wanting a Cheek, an Eye, an Ear, or with one (or all of

them) great at one Side, and small on the other; just so with the House-Courts, Avenues, Gardens, Orchards, &c. where Regularity or Uniformity is not observed. Therefore, whatever you have on the one Hand, make as much, and of the same Form, and in the same Place, on the other." <sup>2</sup>

The first task of the gardener, therefore, was to plot an imaginary central line through the house and from that to calculate parallels and perpendiculars. Every thicket, every pond, every orchard and every bed had to be balanced exactly by an identical one in the other half of the garden. And within the beds each plant had to be arranged by a similar formality.

In such formal gardens there was little scope for planting trees. The effect of the precise walks laid out in straight lines to enclose stereotyped beds would have been lost if tall, spreading branches had been allowed to interrupt the view from the house. Instead the gardener chose to border the paths with hedges of box or holly, neatly trimmed, or clipped into quaint figures of animals or birds. The plots which they enclosed he filled with gooseberry or currant bushes, or perhaps with low apple or pear trees, and with vegetables—seldom, until well after 1750, with flowers.<sup>3</sup> The older houses, built before the craze for uniformity, still had their clumps of trees, designed to shield them from the wind; but it was now the fashion, where trees were planted at all, to set them in parallel straight lines, or else in straight lines radiating from the house "like the Sun sending forth his Beams".<sup>4</sup> Alternatively they might be grouped in geometrical figures, such as squares, oblongs, rhomboids, equilateral triangles, right-angled triangles, hexagons and octagons.<sup>5</sup> Gardening in those days was no occupation for the dullard at mathematics.

A gentleman here and there began quite early in the century to take an interest in tree-planting and in the general improvement of his estate, but there was active opposition. Not only was there the usual objection to enclosure, the first stage in converting ploughed land into policy or pleasure garden, but for some reason the idea had

spread that trees spoilt the ground. Several lairds, therefore, even on estates not far from Edinburgh, planted a few only to find that the local peasants watched for their opportunity and, before long, came in large bodies to uproot them.<sup>6</sup> In the Kirkcudbright district, in 1723, rioting broke out among the tenants when the proprietors began to enclose their ground.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, too, tenants feared the loss of grazing rights through enclosure,<sup>8</sup> whether for tree-planting or for improved methods of agriculture. It took a good deal of perseverance to go on in face of continued opposition.

Turning the pages of their gardening manuals, the gentlemen planters would be hard put to it to decide what kinds of trees to grow. There seemed to be quite an embarrassing choice: oak, elm, ash, "the great *Maple*, commonly, but falsely, called *Plane*", beech, walnut, chestnut, cherry, "the *Line* or *Lidne Tree*, commonly called *Lym*", hornbeam, hazel, birch, poplar, aspen, alder, willow, pine, fir—any of them, it was maintained, would grow on Scottish soil. In practice, the choice was easy: hardly any of them could be obtained.

While there were so few people interested in tree-culture there was little inducement to nurserymen to stock seeds. On that account the handful of country gentlemen who tried to carry out the ambitious schemes which they had drawn up were liable to be disappointed. In 1714, for instance, the Laird of Gask commissioned his brother in Edinburgh to buy him various kinds of seeds; but all the brother could find to send were a hundred chestnuts, which cost two shillings. "Theres neither Cypress seed, Ackorns, nor wallnuts in the whole town", he reported.<sup>9</sup> One early agricultural writer recommended, as a remedy, that seedlings should be brought from England or Holland: "Scarcity causes Extortion", he said, and the very few nurserymen to be found in Scotland were charging prices far too high.<sup>10</sup> For about £3, he pointed out, it was possible to plant eight hundred trees, provided they were imported.<sup>11</sup> (He was reckoning that four hundred of them would be fruit trees. Young elms could in fact be bought in Haddington at 10s. a thousand, and firs about two feet high at 30s. a thousand.<sup>12</sup>)

Whether on account of the difficulty of obtaining seeds or in accordance with the traditional Scottish thrift, very few were bought in those early days. A gardener to one of the Dukes of Atholl once boasted that all the larches in Scotland had sprung from a single one which a former duke had brought in a pot from London.<sup>13</sup> The statement was not quite accurate, although the widespread planting of larches may certainly be attributed to the enterprise of the second Duke.<sup>14</sup> However that may be, the quantity of seed bought for Sir Archibald Grant's Aberdeenshire estate in the year 1719 seems to have been exceptionally high for the time: six pecks of acorns, six and a half ounces of fir seed, one ounce of great pine, half an ounce of silver fir, forty-eight pecks of haws and two pints of broom seeds.<sup>15</sup> But Sir Archibald was an enthusiast, and three years later his gardener, who had caught the infection, was planting alders at the rate of about a thousand a week; he had already planted twenty-three thousand firs.<sup>16</sup> The gardener and his assistants worked with great zeal, and if from time to time they were "weall bedaubd and weall watred with a plentiful rain" <sup>17</sup> they seem scarcely to have bothered. In 1726 Sir Archibald appointed an English gardener to supervise the work. The staff probably waited in some trepidation for his opinion on what they had done already, but he was warm in his approval: the trees in the part of the grounds known as Paradise, he said, were as fine as any he had seen in England, and yet this was a particularly wild part of the country formerly bare of trees or bushes.<sup>18</sup> By 1733, after a tremendous amount of digging and planting, there were over sixty-six thousand trees in the garden and nurseries, including hornbeam, ash, planes, filberts, elms, apples, limes, chestnuts, beech, walnuts, holly and plums.<sup>19</sup>

Planting on such a scale was uncommon until more than twenty years later, yet a good deal had been done by some of the nobility. One of the other places where it was carried on was Dupplin House, near Perth, where by 1725 the Earl of Kinnoull had laid out a vast plantation covering some acres of land previously barren. He succeeded so well,

especially with his Scotch firs, that he lived to cut some of them down to build a large barn.<sup>20</sup> And in the far north, in 1731, yet another amateur planted over two thousand ash-trees at Coulmoney—"the first seen there since the memory of man, except one row planted by himself five years before, round a garden of his own making".<sup>21</sup> Ladies, too, caught the enthusiasm: we find Lady Nairne writing to the Duke of Atholl in 1723 advising him to set a plantation at Blair; "'tis 1000 pittys to neglect it this next season", she wrote, "since probably all our Life such another will not happen for good Scots Accorns".<sup>22</sup>

After about 1760 tree-planting was no longer left to a few enthusiasts. The day of the formal garden was nearly over, and lairds everywhere, influenced by the new fashion for estate improvement, began to plant trees in thousands. As time went on plans became more ambitious. "Returning to nature" was by no means a haphazard process, but was recognised as the province of somebody with an artistic imagination. Sir Walter Scott himself, who favoured the trim, formal type of garden planned as an extension of the character of the house, came fully to appreciate the newer landscape garden, provided that it was designed by somebody with full knowledge of the natural scenery at all seasons.<sup>23</sup> The Duke of Atholl, accordingly, was wise when, about the year 1790, he consulted an artist, Alexander Nasmyth, about the improvements he was about to make to his woodland scenery near Dunkeld. Among other things the Duke wanted a rocky crag planted with trees to relieve its grim austerity. The problem was how to do it: it was quite impossible to climb the crag to set either seeds or plants in the clefts of the rocks. Nasmyth had a great idea. Having seen in front of the castle two guns which were used for firing salutes, he arranged for the village tinsmith to make a number of covered canisters, and had them filled with all kinds of suitable seeds. That done, he had the canisters fired from the cannon against the face of the rock, whereupon they burst and scattered their seeds in all directions; and in due course, as by a miracle, trees were flourishing everywhere.<sup>24</sup>

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One of the early improvers in the north, Sir Archibald Campbell of Clunes, claimed in 1725 to have levelled a considerable piece of land and to have made there "a handsome garden where all sorts of fruit grow that are in Scotland".<sup>25</sup> So far that was not necessarily saying very much. One agricultural enthusiast complained, in fact, that "our Commons don't know the Value of Fruit in Housekeeping", and suggested that if only people would plant orchards and cook the apples and pears for their families they would need far less corn.<sup>26</sup> It was quite true that most of the sudden craze for planting spent itself on so-called "barren" trees. Dr. Johnson, on his famous tour in 1773, had reached the Highlands before he saw a single orchard;<sup>27</sup> or perhaps one should say before he *admitted* that he saw one, for a later visitor noted several which struck him as being quite old.<sup>28</sup>

Many of the best fruit trees were said to have sprung from the gardens of the abbeys and monasteries of pre-Reformation days, and to have come originally from France. There were several varieties. The principal pears were the Grey Achan, Green Pear, Swan Egg, Muirfowl Egg and Longueville. Apples could be chosen from Arbroath Pippins, Grey Ledingtons, Transparents, Thorles, Moncrieff Pippins and others. They were all said to be excellent fruits, well adapted to the northern climate;<sup>29</sup> and, from all accounts, apples and pears seem to have grown well everywhere. One garden, at Arnisdale, Inverness-shire, contained "prodigious quantities" of them.<sup>30</sup> Cherries, too, could be grown successfully as far north as Sutherland, especially if they were trained along a sheltered wall.<sup>31</sup> Farther south, by the same means, peaches, apricots and plums could be made to flourish, with due care. But it must be admitted that, to get good results, the gardener had usually to take a good deal of trouble; and it was quite a trouble, too, to find a suitable gardener in the first place. Lord Fife, finding it impossible to obtain one locally, once wrote from Banff to his factor in Edinburgh urging him to look out for "a sober worthy young man that has been acquainted with a fruit



wall. . . . All the trees in my hot house are dead", he complained, "and everything that requires attention, in the same state."<sup>32</sup> It is strange, considering the difficulties with which enthusiasts such as he were willing to grapple in relatively infertile districts, that, in the region best situated for fruit growing—the mild coastal districts of the west—gardens of any kind were very rare.<sup>33</sup>

"The *Kitchen-Garden* is the best of all *Gardens*", wrote our early gardening expert.<sup>34</sup> But, like all the rest, it must be kept on a regular, orderly plan: "If you plant a Ridge of *Artichocks* on the one Hand, plant another at the same Place on the other. . . . In short, what ever you have on the one Side, you should have the same in every Circumstance on the other."<sup>35</sup> Provided his readers kept to this strict gardening etiquette he seemed willing for them to grow almost any kind of fruit or vegetable. He gave full instructions for growing melons (which he decided were "not worth the while"), cucumbers, strawberries, "artichocks", beans and peas. Of salads and pot-herbs he recommended asparagus as the choicest, but quite approved of purslane, lettuce, cresses, chervil, chicory, endive, spinach, beet, "marygold", celery, parsley, garlic, onions, "colliflower", cabbage and the rest, so long as the gardener took care to "catch *Snails* and *Worms* that gnaws the young sprouting Plants". The sweet herbs he favoured included mint, sage, marjoram, thyme, basil, tansy, penny-royal and rosemary. Finally there were the root vegetables—such crops as "liquorish", parsnips, carrots, turnips, horse-radish and ordinary radish and potatoes.

To safeguard them all the gardener had to conduct a campaign against all the common pests. Moles were to be trapped or dug up with a spade. Mice and toads could either be caught in the special traps imported from Holland or else in pots sunk in the earth, half filled with water and covered with chaff, "wherein they drown themselves". If there were any ant-hills, the gardener had to dislodge them and shovel stiff clay into the place where they had been. He was to set down cow-hooves for wood-lice and earwigs

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“to lodge in all Night”, ready for destruction next morning. To get rid of wasps he must pour boiling water into their nests, and hang up glasses of ale mixed with honey to round up any more. By the time he had dashed water on the trees to kill any caterpillars, had shot all crows, “pyes” and jays, and had hung nets over the fruit, his crop might, it seems, be reasonably safe! <sup>36</sup>

In actual fact most people’s kitchen-gardens seem to have contained nothing much besides kale and, perhaps, gooseberries. In the “novel with a purpose”, *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, Mrs. MacClarty is reproved for the state of her garden, full of docks and nettles. “Na, na,” she replies; “we have some leeks too, and green kail in winter in plenty. We dinna pretend to kickshaws; green kail’s gude eneugh for us.” <sup>37</sup> According to Dr. Johnson, it was Cromwell’s soldiers who had taught the Scots to grow kale. “They cultivate hardly any other plant for common tables,” he said, “and when they had not kail they probably had nothing.” <sup>38</sup>

There were, of course, a few early enthusiasts who between them grew most of the fruits and vegetables mentioned above. Sir John Foulis himself, when the century opened, was already growing most of the vegetables known at the time, as well as a good variety of fruit.<sup>39</sup> The whole of his kitchen-garden produce, in 1703, was valued at 200 marks, or just over £11 sterling. Twenty years later, in East Lothian, John Cockburn of Ormistoun went still better by growing quinces and mulberries as well as the more usual crops. While he was in London he used to send very detailed instructions to his gardener on the care of his fruit trees; and he advised him how and what to plant, aiming (evidently with an eye to future menus) at having something from the garden ready for all seasons.<sup>40</sup> But there were scores of zealous amateurs. One of them, John Law of Lauriston, was so keen on his garden that when the Duke of Argyll called on him in Paris, in 1720 or thereabouts, and found him writing what appeared to be important despatches, they turned out to be nothing more

than a letter to his gardener at Lauriston telling him where to plant cabbages.<sup>41</sup>

In the Highlands kitchen-gardens were late in being developed. The important date was August 1734. In that month Lochiel entertained some guests at his seat at Achnacarry and caused some excitement by offering them a hotch-potch containing peas, turnips and carrots. That was the first time that vegetables had been grown anywhere near there, and it set the local gentry busily planting. But even at the end of the century ordinary tenants still had no gardens of any kind.<sup>42</sup> "You might as well seek for a mangosteen as for an onion, a leek, a turnip, or even a cabbage", wrote a visitor to the Highlands early in the following century; "I will produce you ten thousand Highlanders who never saw either."<sup>43</sup> People in Shetland and Orkney did eat plenty of cabbage to counteract the effects of a largely fish diet, but that was a precaution which inhabitants of the Hebrides failed to take, with the obvious results. "I do not remember", went on our informant, "that I ever saw any other vegetable than potatoes at a real Highland table; and my visits have been paid at seasons when such things would have been in their prime". That was really remarkable, seeing how much better suited were some parts of the Highlands to fruit and vegetable growing than almost any other district of Scotland. But the truth seems to have been that, even in the Lowlands, although more and more gentlemen took to growing vegetables, there were not so many who felt inclined to *eat* them.

It may be that some of the early enthusiasts had the same attitude to vegetables as was shown by R. L. Stevenson's gardener, of immortal fame. The dignified old man thought the world of his cauliflowers, peas and cabbages. Flowers (except foxgloves) he rather despised as childish toys or trifling ornaments for ladies' shelves; and the family had never to show surprise if the flower-beds were invaded by cabbages, or if an outpost of savoys were discovered in the centre of the lawn. "He would trim a hedge, throw away

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a favourite plant, or fill the most favoured and fertile section of the garden with a vegetable that none of us could eat, in supreme contempt for our opinion", Stevenson recalled. But he intended his treasures to be looked at, not eaten. He surrendered them to the cooking-pot only as a very special favour. "If you asked him to send you in one of your own artichokes, 'That I wull, mem,' he would say, 'with pleasure, for it is mair blessed to give than to receive'." 44

In the second half of the century kitchen-gardens, in common with the rest, were changing their design. The kitchen-garden at Blair Castle (the Duke of Atholl's seat, twenty miles from Dunkeld) had by 1760 become a regular show-place. It was about 1200 feet long. Down its whole length there was a lake containing several islands. On two of them thatched houses had been built as breeding-places for swans and wild ducks. There was a pigeon-house at one corner and a gardener's cottage at another, and at one end there was a semicircular summer-house with a glass front. In the walk leading to it there were about twenty grotesque leaden figures, painted, which visitors described as having "a very pretty effect"; and at each end were bright beds of perennial flowers. "This is the most beautifull Kitchen garden I believe in the world", said an admiring tourist.<sup>45</sup> One only wonders, from such a description, why it was called a kitchen-garden at all!

Later on, vegetable-growing ceased to be a fashionable hobby and by the end of the century the fruit and vegetable garden, no longer regarded as ornamental, was taking its modern position well away from the house. The move was not approved by everybody. As one Highland lady said: "A walk of a quarter of a mile on a hot summer's day before reaching the refreshment of fruit is almost as tormenting to the drawing-room division of the family as is the sudden want of a bit of thyme, mint, or parsley to those in authority in the offices, with no one beyond the swing-door idle enough to have half an hour to spare for fetching some".<sup>46</sup>

Where there were no local chemists to dispense ready-

made drugs, an important adjunct to the kitchen-garden was the physic plot. There were two ways of planting physic herbs, according to our gardening expert, and either was correct: they might be arranged either in "tribes and kindreds" or in alphabetical order<sup>47</sup> (presumably so that the servant sent out in haste to find a particular remedy would be in less danger of bringing the wrong one). His list would delight the modern herbalist: lavender, hyssop, feverfew, golden-rod, celandine, wormwood, Solomon's seal, catmint, camomile, southernwood, hart's-tongue, maiden-hair, rhubarb, angelica, "stinking-arag"—those were only a few of many remedies; and the list included one intended, perhaps, for the gardener's private solace—Virginia tobacco. "There be many more", he writes, "besides Multitudes in the Fields, Woods, Glens, Meadows, &c. of good Use, many whereof you may bring into the *Garden*, as I have done."<sup>48</sup>

An eminent physician, Sir Alexander Dick, who was touring the north in 1774, was even more interested in the Duke of Atholl's great rhubarb plantation than he was in the famous kitchen-garden.<sup>49</sup> There was quite a craze for growing Turkey rhubarb at that time: it was the recognised remedy for many ills. Sir Alexander was the acknowledged expert, and a number of people, including Lord Kames, wrote to ask for his advice about raising the roots and drying them.<sup>50</sup> He sold his own crop to an Edinburgh druggist: 9½ pounds of it, in 1777, fetched 9½ guineas.<sup>51</sup>

Flowers in the early days seem to have been regarded as scarcely necessary to the beauty of the garden. Those who did grow them usually chose to arrange them geometrically: a square of tulips, perhaps, a square of boars' ears, one of crocuses, one of anemones, one of cowslips, repeated in the same order on both sides of the walk, "that the whole may be regular and uniformly intermixt all the Year, looking from all Sides, Ends or Angles".<sup>52</sup>

For whatever reason, purchases of flower seeds were small even compared with the rest. In 1705 Sir John Foulis did buy seventy-five tulip bulbs and seventy white

lilacs, and in the following year he received a gift of "100 setts of clowjuliflour, a stalk of anemonies, some setts of lavendar, and some roots of severall kynds". Lady Grisell Baillie's account book, too, shows occasional purchases of bulbs, but nothing like the amount bought nowadays for a small suburban garden. Other people, no doubt, collected the seeds from their own plants year by year, set aside what they wanted to supplement their perennials, and gave the rest away.

In the second half of the century the formal garden gradually gave way to a more natural kind. It is interesting to see that one of Professor Reid's causes for satisfaction with his new Glasgow house, in 1764, was that it had "a large garden, very airy, to walk in, which is not so nicely kept but one may use freedom with it".<sup>53</sup> Bulbs and flower seeds were becoming plentiful; there was already a big trade with the Dutch firms of Voorhelms and Van Zompel,<sup>54</sup> and in 1765 a Society for Importation of Foreign Seeds was formed in Edinburgh, and brought collections in the first year from Quebec, Carolina and Philadelphia.<sup>55</sup> From about that time flowers began to be grown for their own sake, and not simply as patches of colour in a set pattern. To illustrate the change we need only list the seeds bought by the Rose family of Kilravock in a single year: snapdragons, broom, lavender, scabious, columbine, ranunculus, convolvulus, Canterbury bells, lilies, golden-rod, phlox, rose campion, asters, sunflowers, pinks, gilliflowers, larkspurs, marigolds, chrysanthemums, lupins, poppies, nasturtiums, candytuft, jonquils, anemones and tulips—and then more.<sup>56</sup> It was no wonder that little Elizabeth Rose wheedled her parents into giving her a plot of her own; "a fine little garden", she described it to her uncle, "in which I grow many good things; for though the quantities be small, the qualities are good".<sup>57</sup>

An indispensable part of the pleasure garden was the bowling green, which, according to Lord Cockburn, formed the "open-air drawing room" of all the old houses.<sup>58</sup> For the less energetic there were summer-houses, or "fog-

houses" (so called because they were lined with "fog", or moss). A typical one was circular, with a dome-like roof; it had a seat all round fixed to the wall, and a table in the middle; and the roof, wall, seat and table were all covered with moss.<sup>59</sup>

It was still thought best to order seeds from England or Holland. The ones for Kilravock, for instance, came from London, while the bulbs and flowers which Admiral Sir William Fairfax planted in his garden at Burntisland were brought specially from Holland.<sup>60</sup> But in the earlier years, at least, imported seeds were not always so satisfactory as they were expected to be. One of Sir Archibald Grant's gardeners wrote to him in 1723 that "the seeds that cam from London hes not com wel upe. . . . Ther is not any of the silver fire com upp nor the hors chastnot." Another, more cautious by nature, reported in the same year that he had sown birch seed, alders and firs; but, determined not to be swindled, he had bought them on condition that if they did not grow he would not pay.<sup>61</sup> The salesman looked like waiting a long time for his money, but it was probably well to be careful. After all, even the astute Lady Grisell Baillie had once been imposed upon: we are not told whether she traded with a Scottish or an English nursery, but there was no doubt of her annoyance when, in 1712, she entered in her household book, "For young Trees bought by John Hope which was a perfit cheat £2.10.0".

A more unusual garden material to bring from England was gravel. Early in the century the Earl of Mar designed the gardens for Alloway, his seat about four miles from Stirling. For the walks he used gravel which was brought from the Kensington pits: it was taken in at London for ballast and brought by ships sailing up the Forth past the end of his garden.<sup>62</sup>

In the first enthusiasm for gardening some people found themselves short of tools. Lady Grisell Baillie had to buy several items, including "3 shuffels", for 3s. 6d. sterling, and a watering-can, for 4s. 4d. Alexander Jaffray, too, Sir Archibald Grant's friend, who was supervising his gardening

for him, wrote to him in Edinburgh in 1720 telling him to send a dozen English spades at once : his men had no tools ; but a week later he wrote again telling him not to trouble—he had found a local smith who could make spades as good as any that ever came from England. Then Sir Archibald's factor wanted a measuring-rule, and a hunting horn to gather the labourers together.<sup>63</sup> In 1731 yet another enthusiast, Hugh Rose of Kilravock, decided that he too must buy spades and a pick, in order to plant fruit trees. He also bought a wheelbarrow, for 1s. 8d., and two pounds of gunpowder to blow up the stones.<sup>64</sup>

The efforts of all these pioneers were well rewarded. From about 1760 onwards, largely owing to the writings of Lord Kames and to his experiments on his estate at Blair Drummond, gardening became a fine art. By the early nineteenth century there were many well-planned and beautiful gardens. Patrick Neill described a number of them in the monograph on Scottish gardens and orchards which he drew up for the Board of Agriculture in 1813—Lord Eglinton's at Eglinton Castle, the Duke of Buccleuch's at Dalkeith, the Duke of Montrose's at Buchanan, the Earl of Mansfield's at Scone, and many more. They all sound wonderful with their hot-houses, pineries, orangeries and the rest. But in spite of it all, the ordinary Scottish garden was still the simple kale-yard, more or less neglected, abounding in green-stuff for the cooking-pot and yielding, perhaps, a few currants and gooseberries but not much else.



## Chapter IV

### The Kitchen and the Cook

We have seen enough of eighteenth-century living conditions to realise how handicapped the cook must often have been for lack of space. The great mansions had their large, stone kitchens, it is true, but many a laird had to bring up his family and entertain his guests in very cramped quarters. Towards the end of the century the Duchess of Gordon herself used to spend the whole summer in an old "but and ben" house on the Badenoch property. It had a kitchen, certainly, but there was nowhere else for the guests to sit; so the French chef used to betake himself to one of the outhouses, which had no stove and no proper cooking arrangements of any kind. In spite of that, he managed to cook meals which were the talk of the countryside. Being a resourceful man he divided his one great black cooking-pot into four compartments by means of crossed sheets of tin, and in that way he managed to cook four entrées at the same time. The only drawback was that the sauces served at a single meal had to be either all brown or all white.<sup>1</sup>

But her ladyship's cook was a professional. The enthusiastic amateur wanted more room for his experiments, and a bigger array of pots and pans. That was why David Hume, the philosopher-historian, was dissatisfied with his Edinburgh house, "too small to display my great talent for cookery", as he complained in 1769, "the science to which I intend to addict the remaining years of my life!" He was tremendously proud of his cooking. "I have just now lying on the table before me", he once boasted, "a receipt for making *soupe à la reine*, copied with my own hand: for

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beef and cabbage, (a charming dish), and old mutton, and old claret, nobody excels me. I make also sheep-head broth, in a manner that Mr. Keith speaks of it for eight days after." <sup>2</sup>

Ordinary country people, for whom cookery did not provide so great a thrill, usually managed with the very minimum of appliances. First and foremost was the great iron pot, swinging on a chain over the fire, and used for making stews, soups, preserves or anything else which had to be boiled, as well as for heating the water for the washing up. Another necessity was a knocking-stone, a boulder on which one of the household had every morning to beat the oats or bear for the day's broth with a wooden mallet.<sup>3</sup> In addition, if the corn had to be ground at home (as it always had if there was no meal to be bought and no mill within easy reach) it was essential to have a quern, or hand-mill, consisting of two circular stones about a foot and a half across. It was a primitive device, and in its simplest form was almost unchanged from the rotary quern of the Iron Age—the operator merely fed the corn into the quern with one hand and with the other turned a wooden handle which caused the upper stone to rotate. An alternative method was for two women to sit on the ground with the quern between them; one would feed it while the other turned the upper stone, both of them singing as they did it to keep up a steady rhythm.<sup>4</sup>

The other essentials, apart from knives and spoons, were vessels of some kind for holding food and water. In country places they were usually large jars holding from two to four gallons each, made either of brown earthenware or of local clay glazed with crude red ore.<sup>5</sup> That was if there was a local potter. Otherwise, as in the Hebrides and in remote parts of the western Highlands, people had to make do with home-made craggans of coarse clay mixed with sand and gravel, shaped by hand and baked in the open fireplace.<sup>6</sup>

Lady Grisell Baillie, too, used earthenware dishes and basins, but she bought hers in Edinburgh; and while she was there she was able to buy all kinds of superior things

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such as saucepans, ladles, sieves, strainers, frying-pans, scales and weights.<sup>7</sup> The very height of kitchen luxury was to possess a tea-kettle. There were very few of them until late in the century, and Bailie John Steuart of Inverness must have felt a great sense of importance when, in 1718, he wrote to a merchant in Rotterdam for "a handsome tea Copper Kettle", to hold about three quarts.<sup>8</sup>

If all the kitchens of the gentry were as well equipped as that of Sir Archibald Grant in his house at Monymusk, Aberdeenshire, the cooks had little cause to complain. Its contents, in the 'thirties, included five boiling-pots, five saucepans, a frying-pan, a preserving-pan, a gridiron, a tea-kettle on a trivet, a pair of bellows, a copper dripping-pan, two copper coffee-pots and a white iron one, a copper chocolate-pot, a brass ladle, a skimmer, a spice mortar, three spits, a jack, two brass pans, an iron grate, a fender, poker and shovel, two loaf-pans, a salt-chest, a killing-axe, a slicing-knife, a chopping-knife, a rolling-pin, two graters, a coffee-toaster and a copper oven.<sup>9</sup> Add to those a few oddments from other inventories—"a filler for sauceages",<sup>10</sup> a fish-kettle, a dress for the cook, an oil-lamp, a clock,<sup>11</sup> and sets of pewter measures in all sizes from gills to chopins<sup>12</sup>—and there seems to be nothing missing apart from a few modern labour-saving gadgets. Even they were beginning to arrive: by the 'eighties the housewife could buy pastry-cutters, recommended as "much neater and quicker than cutting with a knife".<sup>13</sup>

Although it was useful to have a good supply of pots and pans, some of the Highlanders managed quite well without them. If, for example, they wanted to boil a quarter of mutton, veal, goat or deer they simply cut open the animal's paunch, turned it inside out and fastened it to a hoop; then they had only to fasten on a thong cut from the hide and the whole contraption was ready to hang over the fire as an improvised boiler.<sup>14</sup>

Sir Archibald Grant seems to have been well ahead of his time in having both an iron grate and a copper oven. The oven was probably an open one of the Dutch type, to

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stand before the fire. Most ovens at that time, in England and Scotland, were brick ones, built beside the open fire. Their main drawback, as the account books of both Lady Grisell Baillie and Sir John Foulis show, was that they often needed mending. Sir John once had to buy a hundred new bricks for his, while in 1718 Sir Archibald Campbell, in the north, paid a local oven-maker 14s. for "700 tylls the soling of the big oven and making of the little oven of the house of Calder".<sup>15</sup> Bread and cakes were nearly always baked in brick ovens until much later in the century. Although iron grates began to be made in Scotland in the 'sixties,<sup>16</sup> it was not until after 1780 that they had ovens attached,<sup>17</sup> that being the year in which the first English patent was granted for a grate with an oven at the side. (The principal source of the new grates was probably the recently founded Carron Ironworks.<sup>18</sup>) But most people ate oatcakes or bannocks more often than bread, and cooked them on a girdle or bakestone, sometimes finishing them off by resting them against a toasting-stone before the open fire;<sup>19</sup> so the inconvenience was comparatively slight.

Actually most of the cooking, both in England and Scotland, was done at the open fire. The great cooking-pot hung constantly over the hearth, filled with water if it was wanted for nothing else; and saucepans, and sometimes kettles, were specially fitted with trivets so that they could rest among the hot ashes.<sup>20</sup> Given a bright open fire, a good cook could do wonders with the help of a few pans and, of course, a roasting-spit.

Spits were among the things which particularly impressed Pehr Kalm when he came to England in 1748.<sup>21</sup> It seems strange that he had never seen any before, for they were in general use in France<sup>22</sup> and presumably elsewhere on the Continent. To him they seemed wonderfully labour-saving for people who ate so much meat; but perhaps he had not seen how they worked. He had probably seen joints and poultry skewered on to a spit in front of the fire, with a shallow tray below to catch the dripping, and thought that there was nothing else to do but wait for them to cook.

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But the spit had constantly to be turned, and where there was no mechanical jack to do it (and there seldom was in Scottish houses), the turning had to be done either by a servant or by a dog specially trained for the task. Canny dogs they were, some of them: at the first sign that there was to be roast meat for dinner they would turn tail and flee! <sup>23</sup>

Cooking by an open fire was apt to be both noisy and smelly. We remember Susan Ferrier's account, in *Destiny*, of the preparation for a dinner-party; on going into the house the guest heard "the sound of a jack, now beginning with that low slow mournful whine, which jacks of sensibility are sure to have; then gradually rising to a louder and more grating pitch, till at length one mighty crash, succeeded, as all mighty crashes are, by a momentary silence. Then comes the winding up, which, contrary to all the rules of the drama, is, in fact, only a new beginning, and so on, *ad infinitum*, till the deed is done. With all these progressive sounds was mingled the sharp, shrill, loud voice and Gaelic accents of the *chef de cuisine*, with an occasional clash or clang, at least equal to the fall of the armour in the Castle of Otranto. Then there issued forth with resistless might a smell which defied all human control, and to which doors and windows were but feeble barriers."

Mingled with the fumes from the cooking would be the smoke of the open fire. The peat burnt in Scotland was not smokeless, as the kind burnt in Dutch kitchens was said to be; <sup>24</sup> nor could turf, dung or some of the other substitutes for peat or coal have left the air particularly clear. The much-travelled Mrs. Calderwood sighed for charcoal fires such as she had seen in Brussels: they were smokeless, so twenty of them could be used at a time without any need for a chimney. In Scotland, she pointed out, with its smoky fuel, it was impossible to have more than two stoves going in any kitchen, which made things very difficult for the cooks. <sup>25</sup>

The cook's choice of fuel was limited, as we know. In a corn-growing district he would burn a good deal of straw to brew his beer and to bake his oatcakes, <sup>26</sup> whereas in parts

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of Aberdeenshire he would use heath (the only alternative there, in any case, being turf).<sup>27</sup> If he could persuade himself that the fuel was the right one for the purpose, so much the better; the inhabitants of some of the western isles were doubtless all the happier for believing as they did that their bread, baked over a fire of seaweed, was better than any other.<sup>28</sup>

As good a way as any of heating liquids was to drop a hot stone in the pitcher, as many Highlanders did, especially those in out-of-the-way places. The idea originally was to prevent the vessel from being cracked by placing it too near the fire; but even after iron pans were to be had a good number of people still preferred to go on using heating-stones,<sup>29</sup> in the way that a village grandfather will still meditatively dip the red-hot poker into his tankard of beer.

Really elaborate cookery was thought to call for special fuel, some of it positively dangerous. For one extra-special dinner of beef, mutton, fowls, venison and grouse the cook livened up his fire with large quantities of oil and gunpowder. It is a relief to know that the site chosen for his operations was a marquee near the banks of the Spey!<sup>30</sup> But the French chefs employed in many of the big mansions towards the end of the century, especially in the north, loved a spluttering fire, whether indoors or out; and they kept their kitchen-hands busy with mops dipped in liquid butter with which to feed the flames. The idea was to impart a specially fine flavour to the soup or entrée. Needless to say, there was great indignation among those who could not afford a French chef. "I have tolerably good information", reported one shocked visitor, "that several pounds of butter are consumed daily in producing a pure flame for the purposes of cooking daily in many kitchens in the northern parts of Scotland, though this is a scandalous waste, and a piece of luxury to be utterly reprobated."<sup>31</sup>

One of the leading Scottish cookery experts, Mrs. Maciver, recommended a fuel less extravagant than butter but hardly less dangerous. One of her recipes is headed: "To dress a dish of mutton with paper in place of coals,

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which is thought to eat sweeter than when done on the common fire".<sup>32</sup> The cook was to lay the meat in a necromancer (a flat iron pan with two handles and a close-fitting lid) and cover it with layers of bread, turnip and onion. He was then to tie the pan so that it hung between two chairs, fill it up with boiling water and close it tightly. Then, standing with a handful of waste paper, he was to light one piece after another and move it backwards and forwards underneath the pan; and in less than a quarter of an hour the dish would be done to a turn. (Incidentally, the recipe calls to mind a calamity which once befell Mrs. Baron Mure. When David Hume died she was anxious to show some friends the large bundle of letters she had received from him. They were not to be found. But the kitchen-maid, called to account, exclaimed, "Gude forgie me, ma'am! I've been singin' hens wi' them this half year!"<sup>33</sup>)

An interested observer noticed in 1704 that in all the best Edinburgh houses the cooks adopted French methods, although with perhaps less attention to cleanliness.<sup>34</sup> Some forty years later another writer grumbled that the English, too, had recently given up their simple tastes and conformed to French fashions: "The natural Taste of Fish or Flesh is become nauseous to our fashionable Stomach; . . . all the Earth . . . must be ransacked for Spices, Pickles and Sauces, not to relish but to disguise our Food. Fish, when it has passed the Hands of a French Cook, is no more Fish; it has neither the Taste, Smell, nor appearance of Fish. It, and every Thing else, is dressed in Masquerade, seasoned with slow Poisons."<sup>35</sup> So with the men-cooks in Scotland (cooks were mostly men, as they were in France and Spain and elsewhere<sup>36</sup>): "standing beside a ranting, roaring, parrot-coal fire, in a white apron, and a gingham jacket, they pour sauce out of ae pan into another, to suit the taste of my lord this, and my lady that, turning, by their legerdemain, fish into fowl, and fowl into flesh; till, in the long run, man, woman, and wean, a' chew and champ away, without kenning more what they are eating than ye

ken the day ye'll dee, or whether the Witch of Endor wore a demity faldral, or a manco petticoat ".<sup>37</sup>

A certain amount of deception sometimes saved a difficult situation. Simon, Lord Lovat, for instance, refused to eat haddock; but his cook, when there was no other fish in the house, often managed to serve it to him as whiting by scraping St. Peter's mark off the shoulders.<sup>38</sup> For whatever reason, the cookery-books of the period abound in recipes for making things taste like something quite different—unnecessary hints such as "To make a Tame Duck pass for a Wild one", which was done, it seems, by knocking it on the head with a stick.<sup>39</sup>

Adventurous cooking was all the fashion. Hostesses served entrées of cows' palates and udders, and even of cocks' combs. They were not frugal dishes for the servants' tables, as one might have thought. Tongues and lure (udders), frequently on the menu of the Murray family of Ochertyre, could hardly be condemned as coarse when boiled together with almonds, currants and raisins, seasoned with grated lemon-peel, cinnamon and nutmeg, and garnished with fried parsley and sliced lemons.<sup>40</sup> Nor could even a ragout of ox or cow palates and eyes (revolting though it sounds), if it were cooked with butter, herbs and lemon-juice and served with forcemeat balls, oysters and white wine.<sup>41</sup> Those were Scottish recipes. A London cookery-book went one better: Martha Bradley, in *The British Housewife*, gave a recipe for ducks' tongues—about four dozen of them to a moderate-sized dish—with the comment, "This is one of those Dishes which Caprice and Fancy have brought into Fashion".<sup>42</sup>

How far such conceits were followed it is difficult to say. People certainly bought cookery-books, whether they used them or not. Sir John Foulis chose "lady kents manuall of phisick and cookerie"; and he also had Gervase Markham's *A Way to get Wealth*, which contained *The English Housewife* and *The Country Housewife's Garden*. Lady Grisell Baillie bought three cookery-books in 1715 (possibly for her daughter who got married that year): *The Court and*



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*Country Cook*, for 5s., *Howard's Cookery*, for 2s., and "a book of choise recepts", which cost her 2s. 6d. But Lady Grisell's own cook was restrained from any extravagance by the instructions which her ladyship gave to the housekeeper: "As every thing is weighted to you give out nothing but by weight. 6 ounces pruens for Cockaleekie or stove. 6 oun. Makerony for a smal dish, 8 oun. larger. 6 oun. vermiceli for a soup. a pound peas for a puden or soup. for best short bread 8 lb. flower 3 lb. butter, second short bread 8 lb. flower 2 lb. butter. For a bun of 5 lb. flower 1 lb. butter, 2 lb. raisins, 1 lb. curants, 4 ounces caraway seed, 4 ounces sugar and barm." 43

Throughout the seventeenth century most of the cookery-books had ignored all except home-produced foodstuffs. Sugar was becoming plentiful, but the number of recipes for sweets was very small. Meat, fish and poultry, with beer from home-grown hops, made up the usual menus of the gentry.<sup>44</sup> In Scotland, by 1736, the balance was changing: Mrs. M'Lintock's *Receipts for Cookery and Pastry-Work* include only about fifty for meat, fish and poultry but over a hundred for cakes and biscuits, custards, creams, preserves and confectionery. And very tempting some of them are.

What one specially notices in these old cookery-books is the very subordinate place given to vegetables. Martha Bradley, in *The British Housewife*, did mention the various vegetables in season, but she added a warning that "in all these articles the Housekeeper is to remember, no Stress is to be laid upon them in the Entertainment, but coming in as slight inconsiderable Dishes, they give Variety, and always please".<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Scottish cookery-books contain few recipes for vegetable dishes as such, except for pickles. Small quantities of onions, lettuces, celery, carrots, turnips and greens were put in certain soups (although in the early years of the century marigold leaves, violet leaves, strawberry leaves and endive were more common<sup>46</sup>); but stews were more often flavoured with spices or mixed herbs.

The cook had a good choice of recipes for soups: there

were brown soup, green soup, lobster soup and dozens more. The famous Queen of Scots soup, as made by John Macdonald (footman to several notabilities), consisted of six chickens cut in small pieces and boiled in water seasoned with salt, pepper and parsley. Half a minute before the soup was to be served eight eggs were beaten into it and brought quickly to the boil.<sup>47</sup> It looks extravagant nowadays, but at that time chickens or a tough fowl were often dropped into the soup cauldron. One rather suspects that it was the only way of disposing of some of the skinny variety received as rent. And such enormous quantities were nothing out of the ordinary: "plumb pottage", for example, took a whole hough of beef and a knuckle of veal, boiled in six or seven Scots pints (equal to three times the number of English ones) of water, to which were added the crumb of a twopenny loaf, two pounds each of currants and raisins and a pound of prunes.<sup>48</sup> Barley pottage was probably served in smaller portions: it required a pound of fine barley steeped in two chopins (about two English quarts) of cream. It was seasoned with salt, mace and cinnamon, and sweetened to taste.<sup>49</sup>

Not everybody could have broth made from cream, or even from meat. The people of Barra, indeed, in the Hebrides, had to be content with a concoction of limpets, clams and other shell-fish boiled with oatmeal,<sup>50</sup> which may, of course, have tasted better than it sounds. Considering the great abundance of shell-fish all round the coast, it was a good thing that people were not prejudiced against them. As it was, they were a great stand-by in times of famine; there was more than one occasion when the inhabitants of one or other of the western isles had to fall back on cockles as their principal food. At other times shell-fish were simply a whet to the appetite. Oysters and cockles, in particular, were favourite additions to more substantial dishes. There were several ways of serving them: beef steaks with oyster sauce, for instance; boiled sheep's tongues with oysters; roast mutton with cockles; oyster sausages; or partridges with oysters. If preferred, oysters

or cockles could be fried with eggs. The method was to beat ten or a dozen eggs with breadcrumbs and a gill of cream and then mix in the oysters or cockles (how many the cook had to decide for himself), drop them in spoonfuls into a pan of butter and fry them a light brown. They were ready then, not as a course in themselves (in spite of all those eggs), but as a pretty garnish for "any Dish of Fish".<sup>51</sup>

The way to dress crabs was as follows: "Take the Meat out and cleanse it from the Skins, put it into a Stew pan, with two Gills of white Wine, some Crumbs of Bread, the Grate of a Lemon, Nutmeg, Pepper and Anchovy; put it on the Fire with a little Butter, stir it with the Yolk of an Egg, so dish it". The author added, as a gracious after-thought: "You may put Claret instead of white Wine, if you please".<sup>52</sup>

The only dish which Edward Topham appreciated when he was in Scotland in the 'seventies was cabbiclow—salt cod boiled with parsley and horse-radish and served with egg sauce. He found it "extremely luscious and palatable"; and considering what he said about sheep's head and certain other national dishes, that was indeed high praise.<sup>53</sup> His preference is rather surprising. The more usual way of cooking fish (according to the cookery-books) looks more attractive, with its sauce of white wine or claret flavoured with anchovies, nutmeg and an onion.

Readers of *Guy Mannering* may remember the tasty stew which Meg Merrilies set before Dominie Sampson, "composed of fowls, hares, partridges, and moorgame, boiled in a large mess with potatoes, onions and leeks". The same kind of gipsy food, a real poacher's dish, was served very successfully by the French chef of Henry and Charles, Dukes of Buccleuch, under the name of "Potage à la Meg Merrilies de Derncleugh".<sup>54</sup> But the way most people cooked wild-fowl was by skewering them on to the spit and basting them well with butter; and to give them the right finish they might pour a glass of red wine through them after drawing them off the spit.<sup>55</sup> Ordinary kain-fowls did usually find their way into the stew-pot, it is true, being fit

for little else. Even so, they might eventually contribute to a dish as trim as a formal flower garden, as follows: "Chicken with Tongues, Colliflowers and Greens. Boil your Chickens in Water and Salt, and your Sheep or Hogs Tongues in another Pot: Skim them, then put the Colliflowers in the Middle, and a Tongue between every Chicken, and the Greens round them; put melted Butter over them." <sup>56</sup>

A joint of meat, too, might be either boiled or roasted. The time to allow for cooking was the same in either case—four hours for a twenty-four pound buttock of beef or two hours for a mere eleven pound loin of veal.<sup>57</sup> Stewed rump of beef, by one elaborate recipe, took longer. The cook had to boil it until it was "half enough" (a rather vague direction left to him to interpret); then he was to stuff the holes in the fat and cover the top with a mixture of pepper, salt, mace, nutmeg, parsley, sweet marjoram and thyme bound together with egg; that done, he was to put the meat into a deep pan, add a pint of claret and a gill of vinegar to the gravy, and bake the dish for four hours.<sup>58</sup>

Cooking a pig was much quicker. The chef had only to put it on the spit whole, dredge it with flour and roast it for an hour and a quarter before a very quick fire. To serve it he cut off the head and arranged the jaws and ears round the dish; then he made a sauce of the brains, chopped small and put in melted butter with gravy and chopped boiled egg, and poured it round the meat, which he either left whole or cut down the back.<sup>59</sup>

A smallish family, who might be overfaced with the offer of a whole pig, could be more suitably catered for with a dish of "smothered rabbits", a favourite in England as well as in Scotland. For that the cook boiled the rabbits (two of them) and arranged them to "ly handsomely in the Plate"; then he covered them with three dozen boiled onions beaten very small in a pound of fresh butter.<sup>60</sup> Green geese and young turkeys also lent themselves to being smothered.

The Scottish dish which English travellers agreed in

detesting was boiled sheep's head, which they associated with mouthfuls of partially singed wool. One Scottish writer was very much on the defensive about it. The proper and usual way of preparing the head, he maintained, was to hold it over the fire and scrape off the wool as it was singed, finishing it off by scrubbing it with a hot iron until no traces of wool were left. Then, "being boiled three or four Hours, the Broth and Head are as good a Dish as any one in England. *N.B.* There is less Wool left upon the Head, than upon many Hogs which are eat in England."<sup>61</sup> Some cooks made doubly sure by sending the head to the local smithy to be singed.<sup>62</sup> Even so, it must be admitted that the English had hard work to appear to enjoy it.

There was no prejudice as yet against eating tripe and onions, but for a change some people preferred the tripe roasted. They cut it in squares, spread it with forcemeat stuffing and rolled it up tightly. Then they tied the rolls on the spit and basted them until they were ready to serve with melted butter and sliced orange.<sup>63</sup>

Venison also might be boiled or roasted, unless the family preferred it soured or broiled. A quite pleasant dish was "venison sokey", for which the cook boiled the meat, wrapped it in a paste of brown breadcrumbs, sugar, pepper, salt, nutmeg and minced orange peel wet with white wine, and then baked it for an hour before serving it with white wine boiled with sugar.<sup>64</sup> And we must certainly not overlook another recipe in the same cookery-book, a very necessary one in days of slow communications: "To recover venison when it stinks"!

Several of these recipes depend for their success upon appetising sauces and garnishings. Our traditional caper sauce, bread sauce, sage and onions, apple sauce and the rest were already the recognised accompaniments to joints and poultry, but seldom in so simple a form. Wild-fowl was served with a sauce whose main ingredient was bread, it is true, but by the time the cook had stirred in some claret, spice, nutmeg and sugar it was barely recognisable for what it was. The bread sauce served with chickens was

different again, with its mixture of parsley, sorrel, butter and nutmeg. But in summer the discriminating chef would prefer to dish up his chickens with a garnish of stewed gooseberries and cinnamon. Moreover, although boiled mutton quite rightly had its caper sauce, the cook who could do so would throw in a few oysters as well. There were many other varieties which have since gone out of fashion, such as the mixture of currants, vinegar, claret, butter and nutmeg which correctly accompanied roast pork, rabbits or turkey. In fact, when Voltaire complained that England had a hundred religions but only one sauce he appears to have been speaking too hastily, unless conditions were very different north and south of the border.

It seems right to consider the puddings next, because they might be either savoury or sweet. Of the ones made in skins (a very large group) the chief was, of course, the haggis, alternatively described, according to the nationality of the critic, as the "Great chieftain o' the puddin' race"<sup>65</sup> or as "a dish not more remarkable or more disgusting to the palate, than in appearance"!<sup>66</sup> Here is an eighteenth-century recipe for it: "Make the haggies-bag perfectly clean; parboil the draught; boil the liver very well, so as it will grate; dry the meal before the fire; mince the draught and a pretty large piece of beef very small; grate about half of the liver; mince plenty of suet, and some onions small; mix all these materials very well together, with a handful or two of the dried meal: spread them on the table, and season them properly with salt and mixed spices; take any of the scraps of beef that is left from mincing, and some of the water that boiled the draught, and make about a choppin of good stock of it; then put all the haggies-meat into the bag, and that broth in it: then sew up the bag; but be sure to put out all the wind before you sew it quite close. If you think the bag is thin, you may put it in a cloth. If it is a large haggies, it will take at least two hours boiling."<sup>67</sup>

Black puddings and liver sausage were everyday affairs, but a clever cook could make all kinds of delicious mixtures

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to cram into his pudding-skins : apples, for instance, mixed with grated bread, currants, suet, sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg, and moistened with white wine ; or ground almonds beaten with brandy, sugar and suet and seasoned with cinnamon, nutmeg and grated lemon.<sup>68</sup>

Pies, too, could be either savoury or sweet, as at the present time ; but there was a difference in that the meat, fish or poultry ones were frequently served with a claret sauce. There were the usual kinds of fruit pies ; and in addition, Mrs. M'Lintock gives an inviting recipe for a fruit-and-nut concoction called chestnut pie—a hundred chestnuts cooked with apples, raisins, currants, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, almonds, orange peel and citron.

The majority of the sweets mentioned in the various cookery-books were light, frothy dishes compounded mainly with eggs and cream, which was just as well in view of the solidity of the rest of the food. One of the favourites was flavoured cream : sweetened cream beaten up with strawberry, red-currant or any other suitable fruit juice.<sup>69</sup> Another simple dish, "yellow milk", required six egg-yolks beaten into a pint of sweet cream, the whole being stirred over the fire until almost boiling and then poured into plates and covered with sugar and cinnamon.<sup>70</sup> (It must be borne in mind that a Scots pint was roughly equal to three English ones.) If the cook were in a more extravagant mood, he could make a similar mixture with three pints of cream instead of one, add a spoonful (size unstated) of brandy and "a little Flour to fasten it", tie it in a cloth and boil it. The wobbly result was aptly called "quaking pudding".<sup>71</sup>

Another delicacy was Scots flummery. It took a pint of milk and one of cream, the yolks of nine eggs, a little rose-water, and sugar and nutmeg to taste. The mixture was thickened over a pan of boiling water and then strewn with currants steeped in sack and served hot.<sup>72</sup>

As regards the way to make the famous syllabub there was some difference of opinion. Mrs. M'Lintock's method was to whisk three pints of cream with sugar and the white

of an egg, put it on a drainer and let the liquid run away, and use the remaining "snow" to fill up the eight or nine syllabub glasses which she had already half-filled with sweetened sack or claret.<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Cleland's was more direct: "Sweeten either Wine, Cedar, or strong Ale, put it in a Bowl, take it to the Cow, and milk her on your Liquor as fast as you can". It is a considerable relief to read on: "You may make it at home, by warming it, and pour it on the Liquor out of a Tea Pot".<sup>74</sup>

After all this party fare it is a welcome change to come across a recipe for a Yorkshire pudding. "This is an errant English Dish," says the compiler, adding condescendingly, "but it is a very good one."<sup>75</sup>

We are right in suspecting that some of these recipes were not always carried out to the letter. For proof we have Susanna Maciver's *Cookery and Pastry, as taught and practised by Mrs. Maciver, Teacher of those Arts in Edinburgh*, which was "Calculated for the genteel and middling ranks of life, and not filled with dishes that will never be used by one out of an hundred families that may purchase them". But even she beat six eggs into a rice pudding and made the rather perturbing statement that "The proper sauce for all boil'd puddings is fresh butter beat with wine and sugar".<sup>76</sup>

Cake-making, even under Mrs. Maciver's direction, was a long and tedious process. Her icing for a seed or plum cake took two pounds of sugar, six whites of eggs and a little gum-water. They were to be beaten together until thick: "it will take two hours beating".<sup>77</sup> This "Rich Nun's Cake", too, was an arm-aching business to make (and it looks as if eighteenth-century nuns lived remarkably well): "Take four Pounds of fine Flour, and three Pounds of fine Sugar pounded and sifted; dry both by the Fire, beat four Pounds of Butter with your Hands to a Cream; then beat thirty five Eggs, leaving out half the Whites, and beat them and the Butter together, till all appears like Butter. Put in a Gill of Brandy, and beat it again; then take your Flour and Sugar, with six Ounces of Carraway Seeds, and



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strew it in by Degrees, beating it all the Time for two Hours together. Butter your Hoop, and let it stand three hours in a moderate Oven.”<sup>78</sup>

Those cooks who followed the recipes literally made really enormous cakes seven or eight times the usual modern size. And the mixtures were by no means of the rough “cut and come again” type. A so-called “plumb cake”, for instance, took four pounds of flour, five pounds each of currants and butter, two pounds of ground almonds, thirty-four eggs, two pounds of sugar and two gills of brandy, besides the various spices.<sup>79</sup> Even a seed-cake, which one thinks of as one of the plainest, wanted four pounds of flour, three dozen eggs, three pounds of sugar, two pounds and a half of butter, half a pint of cream, an ounce of carraway seeds, three pounds of citron, three pounds of orange peel, two pounds of almonds, half a pint of brandy and small quantities of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves.<sup>80</sup>

Altogether there was a wonderful choice of cake and biscuit recipes: currant cakes, sponge biscuits, almond biscuits, saffron cakes, fruit biscuits, lemon biscuits, ginger cakes, shortbread, almond cakes and many more. This is one for almond squirts: “Take a lib. of Almonds, blanch them, and beat them in a Mortar; put in the Whites of Eggs now and then, to keep them from oiling; when they are well beaten, take a lib. of Candy-broad Sugar, beat it and search it, and put in the Half of the Sugar among the Almonds, and put it in a clean pan, and set it on the fire, and stir them about, till they come clear from the Bottom of the Pan, then take them out, and work them up with the other Half of the Sugar, and put them through the Squirt, and send them to the Oven”.<sup>81</sup>

Several kinds of cakes and buns required yeast to raise them. Sir John Foulis’s household used to buy “barm to baik” ready to use, at 6s. Scots (6d. sterling) a time.<sup>82</sup> But in the remote parts such as the western islands that was impossible, and, as with so many other things, people had either to make their own or to do without. What some of them did was to twist an oak rod, four to eight inches long,

boil it in wort (unfermented beer) and dry it well; then, when they steeped it in wort a second time, it fermented and made yeast. The same rod could be used for a very long time; one brewer used the same piece for over twenty years.<sup>83</sup>

Those who like toasted cheese may like to know how Elizabeth Cleland thought it should be made: "Toast the Bread and soak it in Wine, set it before the Fire, cut the Cheese in very thin Slices, rub Butter over the Bottom of a Plate, lay the Cheese in, pour in two or three Spoonfuls of Wine, cover it with another Plate, set it on a Chaffing-dish of Coals for three Minutes; then mix it, and when it is done, lay it on the Bread; brown it with a Salamander, or a red hot Shovel".<sup>84</sup> It looks good but extravagant, until we remember that Scottish cheese was often dry and hard, and that many households (including Lady Grisell Baillie's<sup>85</sup>) relied for ordinary use upon the skim-milk variety which they made for themselves.

When the cook had time to spare (though how he ever did is a mystery) he set about filling his store-cupboard. Agricultural improvements gradually gave him a good choice of vegetables to pickle, besides the more unusual things such as walnuts, mushrooms, elder flowers and broom buds. Then there was fruit to bottle or to make into jam. As John Galt shows, in his *Annals of the Parish* for the year 1787, more housewives were making jam than ever before. Earlier in the century, when both sugar and fruit were harder to obtain, few besides the chefs on the great estates had ever attempted to make jams or jellies. And a laborious job they made of it, if they followed the instructions of Mrs. M'Lintock. In preserving red currants, for instance, she told them to "pick them well, take the black heads off them carefully; out at the same Place take the Seeds gently with a Pin, then lay them in fine Sugar, as they are done". Gooseberries were to be treated in similar fashion.

When fruit was scarce the custom grew up of conserving rose petals and hips, and many a housewife liked to go on adding such things to her stores. And she would on no

account be left without a supply of flavoured syrups, whether of violets, roses, lemons, poppies, maidenhair or what else. They were easy to make. If it was a violet syrup she wanted she had only to pick the flowers from the stalks, pour boiling water on them at the rate of a pint to every pound of violets, let them stand for a day and then strain off the liquid. Then she had simply to add two pounds of sifted sugar to every pint of juice, and when the sugar was quite dissolved the syrup was ready for bottling.<sup>86</sup>

In the towns, at least, it was easy to buy oranges, and it was nothing unusual when, in March 1714, Lady Grisell Baillie bought thirty dozen of them and twenty dozen lemons. She kept out two dozen oranges to preserve, and from the rest she had eight gallons of orange wine and twelve gallons of punch. Orange wine long remained a favourite among home-made wines, and it looks as if Bailie John Steuart, when he recalled his daughter from London to Inverness, in 1750, was anxious not only for her company but also for "a quantity of lump sugar, a chist bitter oranges,  $\frac{1}{2}$  du. Lemons, 200 lb. raisins for making wine" which she was to bring with her by sea.<sup>87</sup> Another popular drink was currant wine. Sir Alexander Dick's wife and daughter once made two hogsheads of it, from 320 Scots pints of white currants and £15 sterling worth of sugar.<sup>88</sup> People made wine from all kinds of fruits, and from some vegetables as well.

Most Glasgow households in comfortable circumstances brewed their own ale and beer, although by the end of the century it was becoming cheaper to buy from the public breweries.<sup>89</sup> Farther afield private brewing went on much later. It is amusing to find that one Sutherland lady, round about 1795, naïvely employed a local smuggler to help with hers.<sup>90</sup>

The Shetlanders had very little malt liquor; there was no malt but what came from Orkney. Instead they drank bland, a buttermilk product. The dairy-woman made it when she had finished churning and had taken off the butter: she dropped into the churn two or three large

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round stones, ready heated in the fire, which caused the buttermilk to separate. She set aside the thick substance for the household to eat as curds, and poured the whey, or bland, into small casks; and those she carried to a hut on top of a hill. After the liquor had been there for some months it was so "fine and stout" that, when a little sugar was mixed with it, it was said to be indistinguishable from the best mountain wine.<sup>91</sup>

An excellent night-cap for anybody with a cold was double-rum shrub. Here is a recipe for a twenty-pint barrel of it: "Beat eighteen pounds of single refin'd sugar; put it into the barrel, and pour a pint of lemon and a pint of orange juice upon the sugar; shake the barrel often, and stir it up with a clean stick till the sugar is dissolved. Before you squeeze the fruit, pare four dozen of the lemons and oranges very thin; put on some rum on the rhind, and let it stand until it is to go into the barrel: when the sugar is all melted, fill up the barrel with the rum, and put in the rum that the rhind is amongst along with it. Before the barrel is quite full, shake it heartily, that it may be all well mix'd; then fill up the barrel with the rum, and bung it up; let it stand six weeks before you pierce it."<sup>92</sup>

With such important work to be done it would not have been surprising if the children's wants had been neglected; but the recipe writers, at all events, had not forgotten them. We may be fairly certain that eager word would pass round the younger members of the household whenever the cook found time to open the cookery-book at the sweetmeat pages, and that envoys would be sent to the kitchen to point out the relative virtues of orange tablets, cinnamon tablets, ginger tablets, confected almonds, confected aniseeds and barberry comfits. Or perhaps they would choose rose tablets, for the very pleasure of seeing them made, from scarlet rose-buds, sugar and white of egg.

Cookery-books are one thing and everyday meals are another. It is no more suggested that Scottish eighteenth-century households lived all the time according to Mrs. M'Lintock or Mrs. Maciver than that a later generation

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faithfully followed the precepts of Mrs. Beeton. As we shall see, ordinary fare was determined by local supplies, and might perforce be meagre. On the other hand, the cookery-books from which we have quoted were used in training future housewives; and the chef who valued his reputation would have to be ready at any time to cook a meal to their high standard—if he could devise nothing more ingenious.

## Chapter V

# Food and Drink

In discussing the food of bygone days it is much easier to describe party fare than ordinary, everyday meals. The elaborate menu set before a distinguished guest involves anxious preparation. It is a matter important enough to be recorded in the diary of the hostess and in her letters to intimate friends. If it is successful it may well be described, after a decent interval, in the memoirs of the guest himself. Although, if the visitor is from abroad, he may be curious to try the ordinary food of the people, in a hospitable country (and eighteenth-century Scotland was almost embarrassingly hospitable) he may seldom have the chance.

One thing is fairly certain: the average laird and his family lived far more frugally in the ordinary way than they did when they were entertaining visitors. They would rise to a great occasion and serve dishes reminiscent of the banquets of the mediaeval nobility; but, like those same nobles, between the festivities they would "keep secret house", as the saying used to be, and live on the plainest of fare.<sup>1</sup> The secret was well guarded. Even Edward Burt, with all his knowledge of the Highlanders, found it very difficult to describe their everyday meals. All he could say definitely was that whenever they entertained an Englishman they provided far too much food; "and", he remarked, "it has been often said they will ransack all their tenants rather than we should think meanly of their housekeeping; but I have heard it from many whom they have employed . . . that, although they have been attended at dinner by five or six servants, yet, with all that state, they have often

dined upon oatmeal varied several ways, pickled herrings, or other such cheap and indifferent diet".<sup>2</sup>

Meal of one kind or another formed the staple diet of most of the population. Good wheat was grown in the Lowlands, but the Highlanders depended upon their crops of oats, barley, pease and bear (an inferior kind of barley with a greater yield). The natural distribution was by no means uniform. Large quantities of meal had to be shipped from Inverness round the north of Scotland to the western Highlands and islands. In 1726, for instance, an Inverness merchant sent about 500 bolls to the Laird of Macleod to supply the people of Skye, and on another occasion he sent 2000 bolls to the west coast. There was keen competition with the Irish in supplying meal to those parts.<sup>3</sup> In the east the large estates were usually self-supporting in grain, although at times one laird had to come to the help of another. So, in 1745, Lord George Murray of Tullibardine had to write to his neighbour, the Laird of Gask, for twenty bolls of meal, saying, "I never was so run of meal since I kept house, for I have had a good many work people all summer".<sup>4</sup> In the frequent famine years help of that kind was often called for. After the worst one known, in 1782, Lord Fife's mother wrote to him saying that she had less than a boll of meal on which to maintain her family and seventeen men, and she implored him to let her have twenty bolls to carry her through the winter. (A boll was approximately ten stones. It was usually reckoned that a man ate six bolls of meal a year, a woman four and a child one.)<sup>5</sup>

Some dwellers in Fife were in the fortunate position that, if their grain supplies ran short, they could bargain for more in exchange for coal or salt from their estates. Thus in 1753 the Earl of Wemyss wrote to his factor that their own farm meal would supply the household for some months, but that a contract should be made with a merchant to supply a certain quantity every year, the account to be payable wholly or partly in salt.<sup>6</sup>

The meal was served, according to the time of day, as pottage, brose, bannocks, kale or sowans. Pottage, porridge

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or hasty pudding, as it was variously called, was oatmeal "handed into a pot of boiling water" and thickened; most people ate it cold, either alone or with milk or kale. Brose was made the other way round, by stirring boiling water into a bowl of meal. Another oatmeal-and-water dish was sowans, made by stirring them together and leaving the mixture to stand for a few days until it was turning sour; then the thinner parts were drained off and boiled, making a light pudding best eaten with milk.<sup>7</sup> The most savoury dish with a foundation of meal was kale, which, as its name implies, properly contained a good proportion of greens. It was a broth made from groats, boiling water and, perhaps, some cabbage, boiled for several hours and very often eaten cold.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes the cook added a little meat and sometimes he omitted the vegetables; but whatever its variations the broth was still known by the traditional name of kale. Add to this list the bannocks (meal cakes cooked over the fire on a bakestone) and we begin to realise that the university student who took with him enough meal to last him the term (a quite usual practice) was not necessarily condemning himself to absolute monotony of diet.

In the middle of the century the meals of the poorer classes consisted of porridge or brose for breakfast, with milk or ale; kale and bannocks for dinner (with meat for those who could afford it); and for supper either porridge or sowans or more kale.<sup>9</sup> To eke out this scanty diet some of the Highlanders used to bleed their cows several times in the year and boil the blood until it was solid, ready to eat a little at a time. It was more substantial than it sounds—one household managed for a whole year on boiled blood and a single boll of meal for each member of the family.<sup>10</sup>

In due course most families could supplement their meagre diet with potatoes. As in England, potatoes were almost unknown to the general population before the eighteenth century; and although by the 'forties the English frequently served them with roast meat,<sup>11</sup> the custom had not yet spread to Scotland. They were on sale in Edinburgh in 1701, it is true, and were known in



Inverness by 1720; but it was not until about 1760 that they were widely grown, and not for still another twenty years, in the northern counties, that they found a place on the ordinary menu.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Mary Rose evidently felt that she was giving her husband a piece of real news when she wrote to him from Montcoffer in July 1783 with the comment, "Green pease today to dinner and potatoes".<sup>13</sup> However, by then, in most districts, potatoes and other provisions were fairly plentiful, with the result that Highlanders could at last stop bleeding their cattle (although some of them chose to keep up the practice at the end of the century).<sup>14</sup>

Bread as we know it was not yet part of the ordinary Scottish diet. In many parts of Scotland wheat was difficult to obtain: one Aberdeenshire family, in the 'thirties, used to send to Edinburgh for it, or even to London.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, loaves would obviously be made only where there were ovens to bake them; most households had to do all their cooking on an open fire. The bakers of Edinburgh and other towns used to have a few wheaten loaves for sale, and Sir John Foulis and other discriminating people used to go in and buy one occasionally, at 3s. to 5s. 6d. each <sup>16</sup> (3d. to 5½d. sterling). But not many wanted them. There might now and then be a little wheat bread on the breakfast table in the great houses; and, if there were guests staying in the house, the hostess might cut a few slices at dinner and supper and lay them on top of the cakes. But it was the cakes that went first. Apart from the New Year, it seems, when huge loaves full of aniseeds were part of the traditional spread,<sup>17</sup> there was so little demand for bread that some bakers limited their baking to two days a week.<sup>18</sup>

The baker was sometimes paid by some form of barter. As late as the 'seventies it was still not uncommon for a workman to carry nails instead of money to the baker's shop or to the ale-house. And when people took their own meal to a baker to be made into oatcakes he sometimes recompensed himself by keeping back a certain quantity to sell to other customers.<sup>19</sup> Those other customers usually had

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monthly accounts. That was the case in Perth, where, instead of a book-entry, each family had its own wooden nick-stick. When the baker's man went round with the bread he took with him the duplicate sticks; and each loaf delivered was recorded by cutting a notch both in the household nick-stick and in the tally kept by the baker.<sup>20</sup> The same system was still current in Fife at the end of the century.<sup>21</sup> (It was a curious survival from mediaeval times, but perhaps no more surprising than the accounting system of a certain treasurer of Stirling. That gentleman could reckon quite well but found writing rather difficult. He kept the borough accounts, therefore, by means of two boots, one on each side of the chimney. Into one boot he put all the money he received and into the other the receipts for the money which he paid out; and he balanced his accounts at the end of the year by emptying his boots and counting the money left in one and the totals of the receipts in the other.<sup>22</sup>)

The preference for bannocks even after 1750 must have been surprising to English travellers, for in England by then there was such a demand for white bread (following the widespread improvements in wheat-growing) that bakers were adulterating their flour with alum or chalk to make it whiter still.<sup>23</sup> It was a new fashion, admittedly, for it was not long since the greater part of the English population had depended on maslin bread (a mixture of wheat and rye or barley), or, as in Lancashire and Yorkshire, on oatcakes and not on bread at all.<sup>24</sup>

It was rather strange that in the more fertile parts of Scotland mixed cereals (known there as mashlum or mashhin) were in common use, whereas the Highlanders and people in moorland districts thought such a mixture disgusting. So, although the Lowlanders were quite happy to make their bannocks of mixed barley, peas, oats and rye, the Highlanders, glad enough to get grain of any description, would not dream of using two kinds together.<sup>25</sup> It was an inconvenient sort of prejudice which extended to other foods besides grain.

Where there was a choice, thin oatcakes seem to have been generally preferred to bannocks. There was more than one kind: most of them were about a foot in diameter and a twelfth of an inch thick, and toasted as required (like the ones still made in the north of England); but the Edinburgh oatcakes, just as thin, were triangular, and eaten cold.<sup>26</sup> Best of all were the ones, kneaded with cream and thickly spread with butter, such as were offered to Dorothy Wordsworth on her Highland tour.<sup>27</sup> Compared with them the ordinary barley bannocks were rather unpalatable. They were about half an inch thick, unleavened, and consequently very hard.<sup>28</sup> (The rye bread eaten in Sweden, where one baking was made to last the year, must have been tougher still.) Actually, if they were thin enough, barley cakes were a real delicacy. They were to be found at their daintiest on the best tables of the Highlands and the Hebrides; there they were so flimsy that, after spreading them with butter, one could fold them over and over into a scrunchy mouthful, "which", in the words of an appreciative Frenchman, "render[s] them very agreeable".<sup>29</sup>

Milk to accompany the breakfast porridge was in most parts fairly easy to obtain. The great estates were provided from their home farms. For Edinburgh, among the daily traders there were a number of milkmaids, who rode into the town on horseback with "soor-dook" (buttermilk) barrels strapped across the saddle. It was a popular drink, sold at a penny a Scots pint, and every Edinburgh household had its soor-dook can.<sup>30</sup> Ordinary milk could either be delivered in the same way or carried in the usual pails slung from the shoulders—except, of course, on the steep Highland roads. It would have been impossible there; much of the milk would have been slopped. But the Highland milkmen had devised a much better scheme. They came over the hills carrying their various kinds of milk (from sheep, goats or cows) on their backs in goat-skins, holding the hind feet over their shoulders; and there was a small wooden piggin floating in the milk ready for measuring it out to customers. "The nicer of them", said

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an observer in Inverness, "have a more ingenious Way of carrying the Goat-Skin, by the two Fore Legs; and as there is naturally a Hole at the other End, in which they fix a Tap, it is followed by a *Caudy*, *i.e.* a Boy, with his Piggin, who draws the Milk off as Occasion requires." <sup>31</sup>

Difficulties of transport inevitably meant that supplies of other foods differed between one district and another; but the country household which put its kitchen-garden to good use, in whatever part of Scotland, had ample stores of fruit and vegetables to last throughout the year. Even in December there were still plenty of cabbages, onions, leeks and coleworts; and the prudent housewife could triumphantly bring out her stores of "housed" turnips and other root vegetables, her pickled cucumbers, barberries, artichokes and asparagus, her "housed" apples and pears, and her conserved cherries and plums and other fruits. Quite likely, too, she could still produce a few barrels of her home-made drinks: cyder, perry or metheglin, or perhaps wine made from cherries, raspberries, currants or some other fruit or vegetable.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, not many households were so well supplied. The Rev. John Mill, as far north as Shetland, could speak with pride of his garden produce, as good, he claimed, as any grown in Great Britain;<sup>33</sup> and his zeal was shared by others. But, as we have seen already, there were many who were content with kale, a few gooseberries or currants, and little else in the way of vegetables or fruit.

There were few wild crops to fall back upon. It was possible to pick small raspberries and strawberries in various parts of the country, but the best, and the best nuts, were perilously out of reach in the mountain woods.<sup>34</sup> Admittedly, in the right seasons there were plenty of geans, or wild cherries (said to taste rather like macaroons),<sup>35</sup> and great quantities of bilberries, which the children gathered and sold at a bawbee for a mutchkin (or, in plain English, a halfpenny a pint).<sup>36</sup> Otherwise there was little in the way of fruit. But there was no lack of flavourings: in the district round Inverness, for instance, carraways grew among

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the grass, as well as clumps of wild thyme, pennyroyal and other aromatic herbs.<sup>37</sup>

In a country with such a very long coastline in relation to its area, and with so many stretches of inland water, it is safe to count on an abundance of fish. Off the western Highlands and islands there were tremendous shoals of herrings, haddocks and whiting, and periodically of mackerel; there were good supplies of salmon, cod, ling and eels, and of turbot and other flat fish; and there were cockles and oysters and other shell-fish innumerable,<sup>38</sup> the oysters being so large that people had to cut them in three or four pieces before they could eat them.<sup>39</sup> Herrings in particular were so cheap that in the middle of the century a barrel containing five hundred large ones, seven hundred medium-sized ones or a thousand small ones cost only about £1 : 4s. Scots.<sup>40</sup>

Households in remote districts might have to make their own arrangements for fishing. The Earl of Seaforth, for instance, who round about 1780 lived with his family on the Isle of Lewis for two or three months every summer, had his own boat to supply him with large quantities of fish of all kinds. The fisherman caught them in the bay immediately in front of the house, every day except Sunday, and threw them in a heap on the ground near the kitchen, so that the cook could choose what she wanted for the table and give the rest to the poor.<sup>41</sup> They were fresh enough to satisfy even the Dutch, who, "Epicures in Fish, are so nice", we are told, "that they buy none but what are alive; so that if there be any dead, they are either thrown away, or sold to the Poor for a Trifle".<sup>42</sup>

One of the most plentiful kinds of fish in the Hebrides was the cuddy, caught, if we may believe Dr. Johnson, "like white bait in the Thames, only by dipping a basket and drawing it back". It was a valuable fish, not only for food but also for its oil, on which many households depended for filling their lamps.<sup>43</sup>

Round the Hebrides and Orkney whales and seals were numerous, and both were used as food. Epicures considered

whale flesh better boiled than roasted, and recommended it to be served with vinegar, wine, parsley or hyssop, or with onions and pepper. Whale liver in particular they regarded as a great delicacy: "it smells like Violets," said one enthusiast, "tastes pleasantly, and is very nourishing being salted". Seals, too, were better salted, if only with ashes of burnt seaweed, and the local people ate them with relish. Even the nobility sometimes ate seal, but they preferred it under the name of ham. (Quite apart from the food question, in 1738 "the Use of them for a handsome Covering to Trunks, Portmanteaus, &c. is very well known, besides the Profit that may be made of their Oil".<sup>44</sup>)

Orkney was specially noted for its abundance of lobsters, scallops (which the inhabitants roasted or pickled) and cockles. Fishermen gathered boatloads of cockles at the spring tides and put them into a sea-water enclosure to last the whole month. Oysters, too, were good.<sup>45</sup> But it is doubtful whether oysters were obtained anywhere with so little trouble as at Hopetoun, the Earl of Hopetoun's seat, a few miles from Linlithgow: there was an oyster-bed under the terrace which supplied the kitchen in great quantities all the year round.<sup>46</sup>

In and around Shetland there were ample supplies of fish—large trout and eels from the lakes and plenty of ling, cod, tusk and seth from the sea. But the best of them were packed off to Hamburg or Leith, and the islanders themselves had to make do with the varieties not wanted for export, such as turbot, skate, haddocks and herrings.<sup>47</sup> They preferred them slightly tainted, owing to the local custom of wind-drying them.<sup>48</sup>

Although on the north and east coasts of Scotland the catches were seldom so amazingly large and varied as in the west, fish was plentiful even there. During the last quarter of the century, when prices generally had risen, turbot weighing twenty pounds still cost only about 4d. each.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the herring trade which Bailie John Steuart of Inverness carried on from 1715 onwards was so profitable that he had some of the local proprietors curing for him—

## FOOD AND DRINK

such people as Mrs. Mackenzie of Assynt, the Earl of Cromarty, Sir Colin Mackenzie of Coul, the Laird of Dundonald and Mackenzie of Gairloch.<sup>50</sup> As late as 1792 the price of herrings in Inverness was only "sixpence for twenty score".<sup>51</sup>

We are used to large herring harvests, but not to salmon catches on the scale of those of the eighteenth century. In the Inverness district over a hundred were sometimes caught at one haul,<sup>52</sup> while in Perth, in 1769, three thousand were landed in one morning, weighing 48,000 pounds;<sup>53</sup> but there, twenty years later, although salmon was as plentiful as ever, there was none to be had by the local housewife—the whole supply was sent straight away to London.<sup>54</sup> However, people elsewhere could still get as much as they wanted; and in Wigton, and possibly in other places as well, salmon still cost only 2d. a pound, or at the most 3d.<sup>55</sup> One Scottish housewife complained that salmon in England, by contrast, was tasteless, and cut like cheese.<sup>56</sup>

Overabundance sometimes led to distaste. In Aberdeenshire the rivers Dee and Don were so full of salmon that the servants refused to eat them more than twice a week;<sup>57</sup> and throughout Scotland, so the story goes, indentures usually contained a clause to the effect that apprentices should not have salmon served to them oftener than three times a week.<sup>58</sup> Similarly with other fish: round the western coasts haddocks, mackerel, turbot and the rest were so common that (except for summer visitors such as the Earl of Seaforth) nobody wanted them. Most of the regular population much preferred dog-fish, which they dried and stored for winter.<sup>59</sup> And the people of Kingarth (Bute) would fish for nothing but herrings.<sup>60</sup>

There was local prejudice against other kinds of food, not always because they were cheap. We have already noticed the objections in some parts to mixing grain. Eels, again, which people on the coast ate without question, were scorned in inland districts of the Highlands and of Galloway (where they were plentiful) because they looked too much like snakes.<sup>61</sup> And in the case of pork, although the

Highlanders had excellent supplies of it, most of them would have been disgusted at having to eat any; they preferred to drive the pigs to the Lowlands, where they fetched a good price.<sup>62</sup>

The Highlanders could afford to be fastidious. Their most plentiful provisions were ones which Londoners would have regarded as choicest luxuries: salmon and trout straight from the river, partridges, grouse, hares, ducks, woodcocks and snipe, as well as good pork and delicious mutton. Mutton and beef, in 1730, cost only about 1d. a pound. Partridges were 1d. each or less, and when the snow was on the ground they were brought to market in sack-loads.<sup>63</sup> On such supplies as those the Earl of Seaforth, in his summer residence on the Isle of Lewis, was justifiably said to enjoy more than Asiatic luxury.<sup>64</sup> It certainly paid the Highland lairds to stay on their own estates for the greater part of the year. They could enjoy a thousand comforts "unknown to the votaries after false pleasures elsewhere",<sup>65</sup> as one traveller expressed it. But Colonel Thornton's criticism, on his visit to the Highlands, was that although everything conducive to comfort could be obtained there, at least for nine months in the year, the "supine indolence" of some people prevented them from enjoying the good things as they should have done. He pointed out that although there was hardly a laird's estate where there was not plenty of fish, he seldom saw any of the fresh-water variety at their tables.<sup>66</sup>

The quantity of game brought back from a day's hunting in the Highlands might be rather an embarrassment. The easiest way of disposing of the surplus was to give it away "in compliments", as the saying was. The Ochtertyre House Book shows frequent gifts of that kind, as, in 1737-38: "Received 33 wildfowl from the hills, sent away 18 of them in compliments"; "Received a deer from y<sup>e</sup> forrist and sent the halfe of it in compliments." The household must have had a surfeit of deer by the time they had eaten the other half. It arrived on a Saturday. At dinner that day, and on Sunday and Monday, there was venison soup, and



for supper venison collops; and the servants also had venison. On Tuesday, for dinner, there was venison soup and also "veanison rost and in a pye"; for supper, stewed venison. The servants had the neck for Thursday's dinner, but the family had no more until Friday, when they had venison collops and eggs for supper. Boiled venison for dinner on Saturday seems at last to have finished it off, and for a few days there was a change of menu. Simon, Lord Lovat, apparently not a lover of venison, had no scruples about passing on the "compliments" he received, and in 1745 he sent the Countess of Cromarty a roe which somebody had given to him.<sup>67</sup>

Many of the Highland lairds kept droves of black cattle, some for sale and some for their own tables; and if, when they felt so inclined, they helped themselves to a few Lowland cattle, it was held to be no great crime. There was a subtle distinction between that and ordinary theft: "He that steals a cow from a poor widow, or a stirk from a cottar, is a thief; he that lifts a drove from a Sassenach laird, is a gentleman-drover. And, besides, to take a tree from the forest, a salmon from the river, a deer from the hill, or a cow from a Lowland strath, is what no Highlander need ever think shame upon."<sup>68</sup> Sheep were usually left unmolested—not from any ethical consideration, but because they were too slow on the road.<sup>69</sup> However, things were not quite so bad as they might appear: Lowland gentlemen could insure their stock by paying "blackmail" to a Highland chief. In return he would undertake not to rob them himself, and, further, to recover for them any cattle stolen by other chiefs. If by ill luck he could not track down the missing ones, he would cheerfully make up the loss, so it was alleged, by stealing a few from somebody with whom he had had a quarrel.<sup>70</sup> But it is likely that fewer chiefs were engaged in these unlawful transactions than Sir Walter Scott would have had us believe.

The early eighteenth-century housewife throughout Scotland, as in many parts of England, had to choose between laying in a supply of meat for the winter and doing

without it altogether during the winter months. For lack of winter fodder the cattle were regularly reduced to skin and bone. Each year, therefore, in October or November, those who could afford to do so bought a cow or an ox to salt as the "mart" (probably so called because Martinmas was the time when it was usually done). Lady Grisell Baillie, for instance, in October 1709 bought two oxen, five cows, forty-three sheep and eleven lambs, all for salting. For an ordinary town household the procedure was to buy a cow in the market and ask the butcher to slaughter it and cut it in pieces of the right size to put in barrels; and he was probably given the hide for his trouble.<sup>71</sup> Highlanders and the people of the western isles usually salted beef in a cow's hide, which kept it as well as a barrel and was thought to give it a better flavour; and they often preserved the hind-quarters without salt by hanging them in the smoke near the fire.<sup>72</sup> Whatever method was adopted, there was an important by-product—tallow, which helped to supply the household with soap and candles.

Salt beef is not particularly appetising at the best, and it is easy to sympathise with Lord Fife's instructions to his factor in 1777 to salt him a leg of beef for his use at Mar Lodge, where he was to stay for a week, but not to do it too soon, "so that it may be as little Salt, and not *Stink*, if possible".<sup>73</sup> Actually, by that time the improvements in agriculture had enabled most people to have fresh meat all through the year. But even as late as 1790 it could still be said of parishes in Stirlingshire and elsewhere that there were few families without meat laid up for the winter.<sup>74</sup> It was partly a matter of tradition, but in some districts there was still difficulty in obtaining small quantities. Although, for example, the village of Galston (Ayrshire) had by then two butchers to serve its population of under 600,<sup>75</sup> in Duirinish, on the Isle of Skye, there was none; and if a person wanted beef he had to buy a whole cow, or a whole sheep if he wanted mutton.<sup>76</sup>

By 1750 some of the larger towns did have a market-place where meat could be bought by the pound. Glasgow had

two, which the housewives found a great convenience when it came to haggling about the price. The servants might be sent to buy the cheaper cuts, but the mistress herself would bargain for the joint. It was understood that the butcher's wife would ask 1d. or 1½d. a pound more than she was willing to take; but the housewife had the advantage that, if the Bell Street dealers asked too much, she could threaten to go to the rival market in New Street.<sup>77</sup>

The gradual rise in the prices of food and other commodities during the century was as marked in Scotland as in England. In addition, owing to difficulties of transport, there were considerable local variations. For instance, in Edinburgh, in 1769, chickens were 8d. to 1s. a pair, a fowl was 1s. 2d. and a goose was 2s. 6d. or 3s. In Inverness, in the same year, chickens were 3d. to 4d. a pair, fowls were 4d. to 6d. each, and geese were 1s. to 1s. 2d. Beef, in Inverness, cost from 2d. to 4d. a pound; in Aberdeen it was 2½d. to 5d., and in Edinburgh 2½d. to 4½d.; but whereas in Aberdeen the pound weighed 16 ounces, in Inverness it weighed 22 and in Edinburgh 17½.<sup>78</sup> We must not linger over these price variations—they would fill a book in themselves. It is enough to say that in Ayrshire the prices of provisions doubled between 1740 and 1790, beef rising to 4d. or 5d. a pound, geese to 2s. each, and butter to about 8d. a pound;<sup>79</sup> and that other counties showed approximately the same rate of increase although not the same individual prices.

Most country households kept their own poultry. In Bute, indeed, the fowls almost kept themselves; all the henwife had to do was to gather the small shell-fish called echines (found in abundance on the shore), boil them in their shells and throw them down in a heap; the birds throve on them.<sup>80</sup> Highlanders looked upon their poultry as part of the household, and in wet weather let them share the fireside with the dogs.<sup>81</sup> It was not so easy in the towns, but a number of Edinburgh people managed to keep them in the backyard. Allan Ramsay senior was proud of his efforts at poultry-keeping under such difficulties, and in

1740 wrote happily, "My cocks crow and hens lay with cheerfulness and civility".<sup>82</sup>

To supplement the home supply, many landlords received poultry as part of their rent. Rent-payments in kind were customary in many districts—a custom dating from mediaeval times;<sup>83</sup> and "kain" fowls (as the ones contributed as rent were called) were the commonest of those payments. They were sometimes poor specimens, fit only for the boiling-pot; but, if we may believe a comment in one of Edward Burt's letters, Scottish fowls in general were so thin that the breast-bone of one might be used to carve another.

The rent sometimes included eggs as well. One landlady at least, Lady Helen Sutherland, fixed a minimum size for the ones she would accept: she had an iron gauge, and rejected any that went through.<sup>84</sup> (Egg-paying tenants probably took due note of the hint once given in the *Scots Magazine* on how to make hens lay all the winter: to mix dried nettle-tops with hemp seed and barley-meal and give them two or three pellets of it a day throughout the autumn.<sup>85</sup>)

Rent-payments in kind included a variety of commodities, including certain other foodstuffs, but it will be convenient to consider them later on in connection with the whole problem of obtaining household supplies.

To eke out supplies many families kept pigeons.<sup>86</sup> In Fife, in particular, every gentleman's house had its well-stocked dovecot, or pigeon-house. Edinburgh itself had more than a hundred of them in and around the city, and very useful they were when savoury pies were wanted. Even the poor man, forbidden by law to have a full-sized dovecot, had his little wooden pigeon-house fixed to the gable of his cottage. For centuries pigeons had been the great stand-by in times of scarcity. But towards the end of the eighteenth century the dovecots at last began to fall into disuse. For one thing, it came to be realised that pigeons ate more corn than they were worth; and there was a growing feeling (induced by broad hints) that it was unfair

to keep a multitude of birds to prey on a neighbour's grain.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, now that there was plenty of winter food for the cattle, it was easy to manage without them.

As well as a dovecot, many households kept a beehive or two. Where there was abundant heather a good hive would yield ten to twelve Scots pints of honey (equal to about three times the number of English ones), worth from forty shillings to three pounds.<sup>88</sup> Elsewhere, too, bees were quite profitable to those who would bother with them. But the Rev. George Ridpath, of Roxburghshire, evidently grudged the amount of time he had to give to his swarms, and once confided to his diary that he was "plagued with attending bees".<sup>89</sup>

The food of the upper classes, therefore, was fairly abundant. The casual visitor could usually be sure of a welcome to a meal. What time he could expect it to be served was not so certain, for as the century advanced meal-times in most households got later and later. In the earlier years people got up in the small hours, and even the lawyers were ready to see their clients at four or five o'clock in the morning.<sup>90</sup> Breakfast was correspondingly early. Dinner was not served until between one and two, but by eleven o'clock people were ready for a snack (the "meridian") and half expected friends to call and share it. The "four hours", which later became afternoon tea, was another opportunity for informal visiting. Then came supper, at seven o'clock in winter and nine in summer. Until about 1760 these times were fairly general. Then the people of fashion began to pride themselves on dining later than more ordinary men, and their other meals had to fit in with their new way of life. It was the same tendency which had shown itself in England as early as the reign of Anne, when the middle classes dined at two o'clock and the more fashionable at four.<sup>91</sup> So in Edinburgh, whereas in the 'sixties the "correct" dinner-hour was two o'clock, twenty years later it was four or five; and there was no longer any question of going back to work after the meal—dinner had become a long and serious business in itself.<sup>92</sup>

By 1785, it is rather amusing to find, Sir John Sinclair had so far forgotten the old custom that he wrote home from Paris criticising the two o'clock meal there, so early that little could be done before it<sup>93</sup>—apparently not realising that anything could be done after it!

In Glasgow and elsewhere the change to a later dinner-hour lagged about ten years behind, but by the early nineteenth century the fashionable time everywhere was six o'clock.<sup>94</sup> And, as an inevitable result, the "four hours" disappeared, and a new social function, the late supper-party, took the place of the lighter afternoon meal.

As dinner got later so did breakfast, until at last a hungry and impatient traveller complained bitterly that "in this never-ready, ever-late country" it was never ready until ten, and people wasted the whole morning over it.<sup>95</sup> The Highlander might still get up early, but he began the day with a glass of whisky,<sup>96</sup> which probably helped to tide him over until breakfast. But the Highland breakfast served when visitors were present was well worth waiting for. It was nothing unusual to sit down to a meal of oatcakes and barley bannocks, with both fresh and salt butter; honey, red and black currant jellies, marmalade, conserves and excellent cream; Cheshire and Highland cheese; eggs; fresh and salted herrings; boiled haddocks and whiting; cold round of venison, and beef and mutton hams. Anybody who was still hungry could have cold beef and grouse as well on asking for them.<sup>97</sup> The more substantial dishes were cold, but all the same it is easy to understand why the meal took so long to get ready and went on for two hours. Most travellers agreed in praising the Scottish breakfast, especially when (as at Inveraray Castle late in the century) it was served in a flower-decked room with plenty of newspapers and books lying around.<sup>98</sup> Even the critical Dr. Johnson confessed that it was "a meal in which the Scots, whether of the lowlands or mountains, must be confessed to excel us". His only grumble was that he hated to see the table "polluted" with large slices of Cheshire cheese.<sup>99</sup> If he had been referring to Highland

cheese, made of the milk of sheep or goats, and "hard as flint",<sup>100</sup> it would have been easier to understand. According to a contemporary Scottish writer there was hardly any good cheese made for sale in Scotland,<sup>101</sup> the exception, no doubt, being the celebrated Dunlop variety made in Ayrshire.

Although in ordinary households the food set before visitors bore little relation to everyday meals, at the beginning of the century the gentry at least were used to a solid breakfast. Before long many of them gradually came to prefer a lighter meal,<sup>102</sup> so that by 1750 it was usual in the best Edinburgh houses to begin the day, English fashion, with buttered toast, honey and marmalade.<sup>103</sup> (Continental visitors at that time were in raptures over English toast, a luxury previously quite unknown to them.<sup>104</sup>)

To drink at breakfast-time there was whisky, gin, rum or brandy, either plain or flavoured with local berries.<sup>105</sup> Those who preferred could have coffee or the new beverage coming rapidly into favour—tea. At the beginning of the century wines and spirits were among the largest imports. Some families spent enormous sums on them. Sir John Foulis of Ravelston, for instance, in the two years from March 1705 to March 1707 spent £2195 Scots on drink and £95 on bottles and corks (totalling about £190 sterling), besides the £474 Scots he spent in taverns. That was nearly twice as much as he spent on his garden and farm, and almost two-thirds of what he paid as allowances to his family and for the "depursements of the house" (and, incidentally, more than five hundred times the amount he spent on books).<sup>106</sup> But before long, drinking habits began to change, and by about 1740 Duncan Forbes was complaining, with an eye to the country's revenue, that all classes of people had recently given up their morning glass of ale in favour of tea.<sup>107</sup>

How far the change did affect the revenue is doubtful. Sir John certainly had his brandy brought from Leith in broad daylight (once making the mournful discovery that four bottles had broken in the cart, so that the brandy was lost). But a large number of people chose to smuggle it,

and tea as well. We remember the explanation given to Guy Mannering: "People must have brandy and tea, and there's none in the country but what comes this way—and then there's short accounts, and maybe a keg or two, or a dozen pounds left at your stable door, instead of a d——d lang account at Christmas from Duncan Robb, the grocer at Kippletringan, who has aye a sum to make up, and either wants ready money, or a short-dated bill". Smuggling was so far accepted as a normal procedure in England that a well-respected clergyman thought nothing of doing business the same way: the Rev. James Woodforde, of Norfolk, bought his tea six pounds at a time from a smuggler, who brought it at eleven o'clock at night; <sup>108</sup> and his diary for 1778 records a scandalous payment of £1:5s. "to my smuggler Andrews for a Tub of Gin". But a number of the ministers who contributed to the *Statistical Account of Scotland* inveighed against the practice.

The mid-morning drink was originally a hearty draught of ale or spirits. Both men and women drank heavily; probably not many could compete with the lady in Dumfries who was said to think nothing of drinking a Scots pint of brandy at a sitting! <sup>109</sup> but an English traveller noticed that Scottish ladies drank more than English ones, which he thought was justifiable on account of the climate.<sup>110</sup> But in due course tea came to be preferred, and long before 1750 it was the correct drink to offer to morning callers. It was no consolation to a follower of the old tradition that when the guest's dog quarrelled with one of the host's, and knocked over the silver and china tea-things, the cost of the breakages would have defrayed the expense of the old-style "morning draught" for a whole year.<sup>111</sup> There was a good deal of feeling on the subject. Jonas Hanway in England and Duncan Forbes in Scotland held forth at great length on the evil effects of the new habit; another would-be reformer pointed to the people of Holland—poor nervous wrecks, and all through drinking tea; <sup>112</sup> and the Dunfermline Council in 1743 passed a stern resolution that somebody ought to prevent the habit from spreading.<sup>113</sup> It was all time wasted.



They might have done better to accept the situation calmly, as Bailie John Steuart did, in 1749, when he wrote to his son in London for half a hundredweight of sugar for his wife to put in her unending cups of tea.<sup>114</sup>

The ministers of the kirk were in something of a quandary: which was the bigger evil, tea or whisky? Some thought one, some the other. But one minister, in a Stirlingshire village, had the problem settled for him very nicely by his parishioners: their last cup of tea was always "qualified with a little whisky, which is supposed to correct all the bad effects of the tea".<sup>115</sup>

Some of the tea-addicts would have found our modern brew rather insipid. The Highlanders often put cinnamon in theirs, to give it a more decided flavour.<sup>116</sup> But for a really "good" cup Sutherland was the district, if everybody followed the method adopted by the daughter of Alexander Gordon of Dalchairn: she put about a pound of tea in the pot with nearly a gallon of "burn" water and seasoned the mixture, as she would any other stew, with butter, pepper and salt. She duly served up the liquid, but kept the leaves for the next time<sup>117</sup> (which was just as well, with tea at 15s. a pound or thereabouts). At the other extreme was the potful which the great Adam Smith absent-mindedly made for himself one breakfast-time: "Falling into discourse, Mr. Smith took a piece of bread & butter, which, after he had rolled round & round he put into the teapot & pour'd the water upon it; some time after he poured it into a cup, & when he had tasted it he said it was the worst tea he had ever mett with".<sup>118</sup>

The tea made in England was excellent, according to a French visitor, but he said in disgust that English coffee could hardly be worse.<sup>119</sup> He evidently did not know that in Scotland the Laird of Culcainn proudly served his guests with "coffee" made from his own wheat!<sup>120</sup>

The main meal of the day was dinner, consisting at its poorest, as we have seen, of kale and bannocks. In the early part of the century even the gentry lived simply, and were content with broth and chicken or a joint of meat.

## DOMESTIC LIFE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Intimate friends who were invited to a meal would expect nothing more elaborate.<sup>121</sup> By 1737 menus were a little more varied, to judge from those of the Murray family of Ochertyre. Except for the lack of vegetables some of them might have been taken from a modern household book: such assortments, for instance, as barley broth with fowls in it, roast fowl with egg sauce, and an apple cake; or fish, roast ducks and mince-pies; or, for Sunday dinner, "hare soup hares in it", boiled beef, roast goose, fish with egg sauce, scalloped oysters and mince-pies. Sometimes there was a sweet, but more often there would be a dish, half savoury, half sweet, such as "eggs pottatoes and stewd pears", "eggs and jellies", or the mince-pies themselves, which still contained meat as well as sugar and fruit. It was a rare treat to be offered "stewd prewins and apple fretters", or "a sallad and strawberrys", or "an goossberry tart". Nevertheless, fruit dishes did occasionally appear on the table even in the depth of winter,<sup>122</sup> which was a great tribute to the industry of the domestic staff during the summer months.

A well-to-do Midlothian family, ten years later, served meals very similar to those of the Murrays.<sup>123</sup> Throughout the Lowlands at that time food was still plentiful rather than ostentatious, and during the winter, dinner in a gentleman's house tended to be rather a monotonous spread of barley broth and salt beef, with a boiled fowl and greens.<sup>124</sup> Would-be reformers might speak scathingly of the new extravagant catering, with its "little expensive Ashets, with English Pickles, yea Indian Mangoes, and Catch-up or Anchovy Sawces",<sup>125</sup> but on ordinary occasions such luxury was hard to find. Cocks' combs and other conceits did sometimes appear on Lady Grisell Baillie's menus, but only when she was entertaining fashionable guests.<sup>126</sup>

The choice of joint depended, obviously, on whether the housewife could go to a local market for a few pounds of meat at a time or depended on her own mart. It was convenient to be supplied from the home farm, or to have a salted carcass in the house, but it did raise the problem

of what to do with the heads and tails and insides. One solution was to dish them up for the servants, but some housewives would have regarded that as sinful waste. The haggis disposed of some of the parts most difficult to serve in a genteel form. The rest, at any rate in the house of Murray of Ochtertyre, appeared on the menu without pretence: "skink and tripe", perhaps, "tongues and lure", "pettytoes" (pigs' feet), or "hogs cheek". Cooked according to the instructions of Mrs. M'Lintock or Elizabeth Cleland, even the coarsest of them were far from repulsive. Moreover, if we feel rather repelled by Bishop Pococke's enthusiasm for the calves' ears on toast served to him in Thurso in 1760,<sup>127</sup> we may remind ourselves that in Germany at that time the choicest parts of a pig were held to be the ears and the tip of the nose! <sup>128</sup>

Those who prepared the mart every year could hardly avoid falling into a fixed routine of cooking it. It was usual in some parts to begin by inviting the neighbours to a "spare-rib" dinner,<sup>129</sup> but Miss Menie Trotter, a lady well known for her little oddities, always began at the nose and worked steadily on to the tail,<sup>130</sup> which at least had the advantage that her friends knew well in advance which of her invitations to decline. One dish which, apparently, few Scots would decline was sheep's head, a delicacy which, as we have already mentioned, English visitors were slow to appreciate. (We remember the story of the Englishman in *Rob Roy*, entertained by Bailie Jarvie, "eating, with rueful complaisance, mouthful after mouthful of singed wool, and pronouncing it excellent, in a tone in which disgust almost overpowered civility".) Some travellers' tales, indeed, give the impression that the Scots lived mainly on sheeps' heads and oatmeal, until one is reminded, with Smollett's Win Jenkins, that "there could be no *heads* without *karkasses*".<sup>131</sup>

The company at a typical Highland gathering was so varied that, by feeding every man according to his rank (and ignoring his tastes), it was possible to get rid of the inferior cuts of meat without difficulty. In seventeenth-

century England the retainers and unimportant guests seated at the lower tables had often had to eat humble pie, made of the various "umbles" — livers, hearts and entrails.<sup>132</sup> In the same way, in the Highlands of Scotland, the people sitting "below the salt" were still liable to fare very differently from those at the head of the table. So, at Castle Dunie, Simon, Lord Lovat, had his table loaded with food of all kinds, ranging from the most luxurious to the very coarse. At the head of the table were the dainties, excellently served. About the middle were good, substantial dishes such as roast mutton and plain pudding. At the bottom were coarse pieces of beef, sheep's heads, haggis and such like, served in a slovenly manner in great pewter platters. The company ranged from distinguished guests, at the head of the table, to the hungry retainers (younger sons of younger brothers) who sat at the foot; and the host suited his invitation to the person. "My Lord," he would begin, "here is excellent venison, fine turbot, etc., call for any wine you please, there is excellent Claret and Champagne on the sideboard. Pray, now, Dumballoch, or Kilbockie, help yourselves to what is before you, these are Port and Lisbon, strong ale and porter, excellent in their kind." Then, calling to the other end of the table: "Pray, dear cousin, help yourself, and my other cousins, to that fine beef and cabbage. There is whisky punch and excellent table beer."<sup>133</sup> It was an unpleasant custom, but one by no means confined to Lord Lovat's household. Many years later, in 1790 and after, a similar distinction was still made between the fifty or more people who in the shooting season sat down to dinner in the great hall of Castle Grant, Speyside.<sup>134</sup>

The dinners described so far were always served as a single course. Until late in the century the dishes forming an ordinary family dinner were almost invariably brought on the table at one and the same time (a custom which in England had long been abandoned). Mrs. Maciver's cookery-book, for instance, published in 1787, gave a number of specimen menus for family dinners: they ranged from

five to fifteen dishes, all forming one course, except that where there were more than seven items one of them came in as a "remove". Here is her menu of eight dishes: "Cod's Head removed, with Roast Duckling. Gooseberry Sauce. Orange Pudding. Fricasee of Pallets. Minched Pie. Boiled Leg Lamb and Loin fried. Cauliflower." <sup>135</sup>

On ceremonial occasions dinner was served in two courses, as it was in England. In 1701, for instance, when the Duchess of Buccleuch entertained the Earl of Rothes, the Earl of Haddington, Lord Elcho and three other gentlemen at Dalkeith, this was one of the menus: first course—two hundred oysters, bacon and pease pottage, haggis, beef collops, three joints of roast mutton, fricassée of five chickens, and, as the remove, a roast goose; second course—six wild fowl and six chickens, buttered crabs, collared beef, tarts and four roast hens.<sup>136</sup> Lady Grisell Baillie split up her dinners in a similar way. But the height of magnificence was to divide the meal in three. Lady Oxford was considerably impressed, in 1745, when she was entertained in Edinburgh by the Lord High Commissioner, with a "very fine dinner, the first course fifteen, the second course eighteen, and the dessert thirty dishes"; and Lord Hope-toun went one better with "fine dinners of three courses and a dessert".<sup>137</sup> Such luxury was seldom seen until many years later. In fact, when, about the year 1786, Mrs. Andrew Stirling of Drumpellier served a two-course dinner (the first time such a thing had been known in the neighbourhood of Glasgow), it created such a stir that she felt called upon to justify herself against the charge of extravagance: she had put no more dishes on the table than before, she pointed out; all that she had done was to divide her dinner in two.<sup>138</sup> That, actually, was all that anybody did so far. There was only a very rudimentary division into savouries and sweets. The sweet certainly appeared as part of the final course, but it was flanked by various dishes of meat and poultry. The one rule which does emerge from a contemporary English cookery-book is that boiled meats must always be served before roast.<sup>139</sup>

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From this point of view England and Scotland formed a complete contrast to, say, Sweden. There, far from the whole of the food being served at once, or even in two or three courses, each dish formed a course in itself. Dish after dish was changed, in seemingly endless rotation, and handed round solemnly to each guest. Dinner was a two-hour ceremony. Before the meal, as a whet to the appetite, the company usually ate bread and butter, cheese, and raw salmon or anchovies from a side-table, and drank a glass of brandy.<sup>140</sup> It was a similar idea to the Scottish one of serving roasted gannets (solan geese) some little time before dinner.<sup>141</sup>

The drinks served at dinner varied according to the district. In the Lowlands at the beginning of the century, as in England, ale was the ordinary drink except when guests were present. In due course ale was given up, except by old-fashioned people, in favour of punch, which was made at first of French brandy, but after 1745 of rum.<sup>142</sup> Punch at its best was flavoured with lemons. Many punch-drinkers had yearly contracts for them. A Glasgow dealer, in 1756, offered a regular supply of lemons and oranges throughout the year at a shilling a dozen, with a shilling in the pound discount. Over a hundred people had already paid an annual subscription, and if by any mischance the supply should run out the retailer agreed to let them have French lemon-juice instead, at 2s. a Scots pint. "It is hoped", the advertisement stated, "this method will prevent the gentlemen's drinking punch with cremitartar in place of lemons, which several has owned their being the worse of it."<sup>143</sup>

The usual wine was claret, especially until about 1780, while it was exempt from duty; a few years later anti-French feeling made it less popular.<sup>144</sup> It was less strong than the kind sold in London, but it had a finer flavour; some English connoisseurs regularly ordered theirs from Leith.<sup>145</sup> Excellent port wine, too, could be had in Edinburgh, "not resembling the adulterated trash sold under that name in England".<sup>146</sup> Most Highlanders drank whisky or brandy

rather than wine. There were three main varieties: common usquebaugh, or whisky; trestarig, or aquavita, three times distilled, and very strong; and usquebaugh-baul, four times distilled, and so strong that two spoonfuls of it would endanger a man's life.<sup>147</sup> But the whey commonly drunk by the Shetlanders was said to be almost as intoxicating by the time it had been barrelled and stored.<sup>148</sup>

The drink question apart, Dr. Johnson, in his extensive tour through Scotland, noticed little difference between dinners in Scotland and England.<sup>149</sup> But he was forgetting the great variety of fish and game to be found at the Highland tables and hardly to be had at any price in London. One traveller estimated that in the Hebrides and on the coast of the mainland a gentleman could entertain twenty people for fifteen shillings or a pound, whereas in London the same food would cost twenty pounds.<sup>150</sup> Johnson was forgetting, too, the Scotch broth which he so enjoyed that, after eating several platefuls of it, he said, "I don't care how soon I eat it again".<sup>151</sup> In England soup was not a regular part of the menu; the liquor from boiled meat was sometimes used as food for calves.<sup>152</sup> Vegetables were another story. When John Wesley was first in Scotland, in the middle of the century, he never saw any at all, even at a nobleman's table. (The French at that time had the reputation of being great eaters of "herbs and roots", although a French visitor declared that the English ate far more.<sup>153</sup>) By the 'eighties the Lowlanders of Scotland had acquired a taste for them,<sup>154</sup> and English travellers found it difficult to hide their surprise at being offered a plate of small yellow turnips ("neeps") among the choice fruits at dessert.

When dinner was at one o'clock or two there was a break between it and the "four hours", at which the family took ale or wine or, later on, tea and cakes. As the main meal got later, tea or coffee and "cookies" followed almost straight away.<sup>155</sup> The cakes were usually home-made. The housewife who had no cookery-book made up recipes of her own, and very proud she must have been when her inventions came to be spoken of by her own name, as, for

example, "Lady Cullen's cookies".<sup>156</sup> But for really important occasions the cakes were bought ready-made. For Rachel Baillie's wedding, in 1717, Lady Grisell spent over £15 sterling on "Confections Plumcaks and Bisket from Mrs. Fenton", in Edinburgh.<sup>157</sup> But what it cost Dr. Robert Innes to send the Laird of Thunderton two plum cakes and two boxes of sugar biscuit from Elgin is difficult to guess, for in his anxiety he sent the baker as well to superintend the unpacking, "least the glasing or garnishing be spoiled".<sup>158</sup>

After an early dinner people would be quite ready by seven o'clock to eat a supper of "Eggs in the shell, Hogs cheeck, Pickld oysters, Smoakt beefe"<sup>159</sup> or whatever else there might be. Round about 1750, indeed, in the Lowlands, supper was the principal meal to which guests were invited,<sup>160</sup> in direct contrast to the English custom of making it a very sparing one of a single dish (usually cold meat left over from dinner) followed by a little cheese.<sup>161</sup> But one can sympathise with the eminent Frenchman who, after enjoying a Highland dinner and tea, found it "somewhat unpleasant to be obliged to take one's seat at table again about 10 o'clock, and remain until mid-night over a supper nearly of the same fare as the dinner, and in no less abundance".<sup>162</sup> Often, when supper was as late as that (as in many households it was by the end of the century), some of the party would not bother to attend.<sup>163</sup>

The question arises as to how much people actually ate and drank. To judge by Lord Strathnaver's household at Dunrobin it was a colossal amount. Admittedly, there were from sixteen to nineteen servants to feed; but servants as a rule fared none too well. Also there may have been a large number of guests. Nevertheless, the supplies of food for the establishment for the year 1712 to 1713 look more than ample: 19 cows, 29 deer, 67 wedders, 31 calves, 5 lambs, 26 kids, 5 swine, 213 rabbits, 134 wild-fowl, 473 hens, 230 chickens, 834 pigeons, 2485 eggs, 400 herrings and 5389 other fish. The quantity of ale drunk, averaging 10½ bottles a day, seems quite small in comparison.<sup>164</sup> (The



Earl of Menteith's allowance for his household, to judge from a contract which he made with his wife in 1686, had been more sparing, but it had been supplemented by "all the hens, poultry and capons of Menteith and Drummond", "all the fish from the waters there" and "all the venison and wild fowl to be had".<sup>165</sup> In one year, too (1736), the household of the Grants of Monymusk consumed 15 geese, 108 capons, 355 hens, 184 chickens and 35 ducks besides what were bred on the home farm (and besides nearly 6000 eggs and great quantities of meat, including 86 neat's tongues costing "4½d p foot").<sup>166</sup> Or take the Baillie household at Mellerstain in 1748 (after Lady Grisell's death): it was then a ladies' establishment, but it disposed of 6 oxen, 19 wedders, 11 lambs, 1 ewe, 3 calves, 4 swine, 10 pigs, 2284 eggs "besides those of our own hens", 300 pounds of butter, 24 cheeses, 376 birds of various kinds (some of which were given away), over 111 stone of flour and 264 stone of oatmeal, besides other foodstuffs.<sup>167</sup> The same ladies, in the same year, bought 1265 bottles of ale, beer and wine (about three-quarters of it being ale and beer), as well as 850 gallons Scots of "small beer in barels". Apart from ale and beer they evidently preferred port wine, "chirrie" and cyder; but they also bought over thirty bottles of claret and Canary.<sup>168</sup> They bought almost as much in the following year.<sup>169</sup>

The Scots as a whole were noted for being immoderate drinkers, although not so intemperate as the Germans.<sup>170</sup> Some Highlanders drank three or four quarts of whisky at a sitting<sup>171</sup> (admittedly, they sat for a very long time!). They were used to it and it was rare to see anybody drunk, except at a merry-making.<sup>172</sup> But there is a sad story of one John Pearson of Kippenross, a great lover of the bottle, who had such an enormous one that it used to be pushed into the room on a wheelbarrow: one night, having drunk rather too much even for him, he gambled away the whole of his estate to a neighbour.<sup>173</sup>

Several times in the course of the century there were poor harvests followed by famine, and drastic action had to

be taken to eke out supplies. The harvest of 1782 was so bad that the gentlemen of Aberdeen resolved to give up drinking home-made spirits at all, or any malt liquors brewed from Scottish grain.<sup>174</sup> In the worst famine of all, the one of 1795-96, a public proclamation was issued calling for voluntary rationing of bread at the rate of a loaf a week for each person—"an odd proceeding", to Lord Cockburn's way of thinking. But even in such a time of desperate scarcity the gentry kept up their wonted display: the usual number of pies appeared on the table at dinner, but the guests understood, although they tactfully made no comment, that the ones not cut open were simply imitations skilfully made of clay.<sup>175</sup>

The French were in the habit of eating some of every dish brought to table, even though there were twenty or more. According to Smollett's doubtful translation they called it "doing justice to the founder".<sup>176</sup> A Scottish counterpart in fiction, Lady Elizabeth Malcolm,<sup>177</sup> also pecked like a sparrow at each of the numerous dishes on the dinner-table, holding the theory that "the stomach requires to be amused as well as the mind". It seems, indeed, that women seldom did more than "peck" when in company: it was thought most indelicate for them to be seen eating a full meal. But they took care to have plenty beforehand so that they might not be tempted to eat too heartily at table.<sup>178</sup>

Men were not expected to be so abstemious. It was the fashion at the beginning of the century to press male visitors to eat more and more; but the custom, which began out of simple kindness, was so overdone that many a diffident guest ate far more than he wanted rather than offend his host. The best safeguard was for him to eat very slowly and avoid emptying his plate. But some of the bolder spirits cared little for the feelings of the host: George Home of Argaty, for one, straightway threw down his knife if anybody tried to press food upon him.<sup>179</sup>

It is curious that such thoughtlessness should prevail in this one respect when the general standard of etiquette

among the upper classes was so high. Admittedly, a few people had still to learn the rudiments of table manners, as: "Do not gnaw your Bones too clean, nor shake or break them at Table. Put not both your Hands to your Mouth at once. Be sure to throw nothing in [*sic*] the Floor, 'tis uncivil and disobliging."<sup>180</sup> But attention to those points alone would not stamp anybody as well-bred. For that, there were many precepts to be borne in mind, as, for example: "It is undecent to speak of any thing that may turn the Stomach and deaden the Appetite; as of loathsome Distempers, or certain Creatures which delicate Persons cannot bear the Sight or Thoughts of"; "It is clownish to pick the Shells of an Egg with your Fingers: Pair it with your Knife"; "When you take an Apple or Toast from the Fire, do not blow the Ashes off; for there is no Wind without Water; use some other Way to cleanse it from the Ashes. Neither cleanse it with your Handkerchief, tho newly washed; for the other knows not if it be so." Anybody who kept those rules and also remembered never to smell at his food, never to blow on it when it was hot, and never to offer a fellow diner the top slice of bread or cheese, lest it were dry, was well on the road to gentility.<sup>181</sup> By that time (1720) it was no longer correct for men to wear their hats at meal times, as it still was in France;<sup>182</sup> but the custom still lingered in country districts. So with a further instruction, never to touch any food but bread with the fingers, but to use a fork:<sup>183</sup> Highlanders, according to Dr. Johnson, seldom had forks to use; they cut up their food with a knife and then transferred it to their mouths with their fingers.<sup>184</sup> But it seems that forks were used for carrying food to the mouth earlier in Scotland and in France than they were in England. A French visitor, towards the end of the century, was pleased to see at Inveraray Castle forks of the same kind as those used in France. "I am not much disposed", he said, "to risk pricking my mouth or my tongue with those little sharp steel tridents which are generally used even in the best houses of England. I know that this kind of forks are only

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intended for seizing and fixing the pieces of meat while they are cut, and that the English knives being rounded at the point, may answer for some of the purposes to which the French forks are applied, particularly in carrying meat to the mouth; but, I must confess, that I use their knives very awkwardly in this way." The explanation was, he thought, that at table the English could calculate better than the French. "In England, the fork is always held in the left hand, and the knife in the right. The fork holds the meat down, the knife cuts it, and the pieces may be carried to the mouth with either. The motion is quick and precise. The manœuvres at an English dinner are founded upon the same principle as the Prussian discipline—Not a moment is lost." In France (and evidently also in Scotland, as in America to-day), the first movement was the same, but, when the meat was cut, the knife was laid on the right side of the plate, the fork was changed to the right hand and carried the food to the mouth. His conclusion on this important subject was that the English method was the best, but that it called for large knives with rounded ends.<sup>185</sup>

For refreshments served between meals it was unusual to spread a table-cloth. It was more correct to fold a napkin in half and lay it underneath the plate, and to put a knife and fork and another napkin on the plate.<sup>186</sup> Nor was any cloth laid for the comparatively light breakfast served, by the middle of the century, in the Lowlands; there was simply a small linen napkin for each person.<sup>187</sup> Dinner was a much more ceremonial affair, calling for a full display of napery. And woe betide the miserable offender who presumed to lay down his napkin before all his superiors at table had done so! <sup>188</sup>

Two bells were rung for every meal (if we may generalise from the practice in Lady Grisell Baillie's household)—half an hour before it was to be served and when it was ready for table. The servants assembled in the room before the company arrived, and the butler made sure that the side-board was adequately stocked with water, wine, ale and

beer, sugar, vinegar and anything else likely to be wanted.<sup>189</sup> The dishes were arranged in strict order. Soup or fish always went to the head of the table. Failing either of those, the principal dish went to the top (boiled meat taking precedence over roast) and the next in importance went to the bottom, with the smaller ones at the sides.<sup>190</sup>

At an ordinary farmhouse meal, according to Mrs. Hamilton, the farmer and his sons sat on one side of the table and the good-wife and her daughters on the other, leaving the arm-chair at the head of the table for the guest. The little maid-of-all-work is described as sitting on a stool at the foot, with her back to the table, turning round only occasionally to help herself to more food;<sup>191</sup> but whether that was a customary way of observing class distinctions is difficult to say.

By the end of the century the practice at a formal dinner-party was for the ladies to be taken in by the gentlemen, in the modern way. A few years earlier that would have been regarded as most improper. "There was no such alarming proceeding", Lord Cockburn recalled, "as that of each gentleman approaching a lady, and the two hooking together. This would have excited as much horror as the waltz at first did."<sup>192</sup> Instead, the ladies filed into the dining-room first, in order of precedence. The procession, properly conducted, was slow and dignified; but it has been hinted that there was sometimes "some little scuffling among the dowagers about precedence, and occasionally a poke of the elbow given and returned with interest"! <sup>193</sup> The gentlemen followed in single file. The ladies lingered at the backs of their chairs waiting to know their fate, and watched anxiously as each man, on entering, approached the partner of his choice.

Before the meal could begin the company had to listen to a lengthy grace recited, perhaps, by the family chaplain. So strict was religious observance, particularly in the earlier part of the century, that even the mid-morning drink had to be preceded by a prayer.<sup>194</sup> When grace was said so often it tended to become rather set and uninspired, but the

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Rev. John M'Leod, who in the 'eighties was a regular guest at Glasgow dinner-parties, had one to suit every kind of dinner. He would take a quick survey of the table and choose his words accordingly; and the hostess must have been well gratified when she heard him begin the grace reserved for extra sumptuous spreads, opening with " Bountiful Jehovah ".<sup>195</sup>

In the Highlands it was customary for the pipers to play throughout the meal, an attention with which some English guests would gladly have dispensed. One lady admitted that to her it was " more dreadful, than the grunting of pigs, the screaming of owls, and the squalling of cats ".<sup>196</sup> But no doubt she and her fellow sufferers politely feigned the enjoyment which they were far from feeling.

The mistress of the house presided at table, and served the various dishes. It was her duty also to begin the ceremony of toasting.<sup>197</sup> A Frenchman who toured England and Scotland early in the century was much amused with this custom of drinking healths. It had almost died out in France, as being " equally impertinent and ridiculous "; but here, he thought, nothing could be funnier than " to see a Man that is just going to chew a Mouthful of Victuals, cut a Piece of Bread, wipe his Fingers, or any Thing of that Nature, in a Moment put on a grave serious Face, keep his Eyes fix'd upon the Person that drinks his Health, and grow as motionless as if he were taken with an universal Palsy, or struck with a Thunderbolt ".<sup>198</sup> According to Lord Cockburn, toasting was a real torment. Instead of being put off to the end of the meal, as it was by the nineteenth century, it went on right through dinner; every glass had to be dedicated to the health of someone. And it had to be acknowledged with dignity; " no nods or grins, or indifference; but a direct look at the object, the audible uttering of the very words—' Your good health ', accompanied by a respectful inclination of the head, a gentle attraction of the right hand towards the heart, and a gratified smile ". As soon as the table was cleared each person was expected to drink the health of every other person present, individually.

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Then there were "rounds" of toasts, when each gentleman of the party in turn named an absent lady and each lady an absent gentleman. Worst ordeal of all, for the bashful, was the custom of calling for "sentiments": everybody, when called upon, had to be ready with some such uplifting remark as, "May the pleasures of the evening bear the reflections of the morning", or "May the honest heart never feel distress". There was a good ready-made stock of suitable sentiments, but, all the same, those who were at all timid went through some agonising moments until their turns were over.<sup>199</sup>

The time came at last for the ladies to retire. If they delayed it too long the host was apt to give them a broad hint by drinking their health in the character of "the outward bound", winking significantly to his wife as he did so.<sup>200</sup> (In Glasgow the "signal" toast was "the trade of Glasgow and the outward bound"; in Fife, in the time of a celebrated Lady Balgonie, it was "*Lady be-gone-ye*").<sup>201</sup> Then the men could begin drinking in real earnest. The host brought out the punch-bowl and entrusted one of the party with the serious business of "handling the china". For half an hour or more after the punch was made the company would taste it critically lest it should be too strong or too sweet, or wanting another "squeeze of a yellow" or one more lump of sugar.<sup>202</sup> Then they settled down to enjoy themselves. And if they were living in the Hebrides they opened the house doors wide and put a rod across the opening as a sign that they were engaged on weighty business and must on no account be disturbed.<sup>203</sup>

Dinner was thus liable to last for a very long time. It would not do to believe all the tales one is told. It may or may not be true that when a client of the famous advocate, Charles Hay, called one day at four o'clock he was surprised to find him at dinner, and told the servant that he had understood five to be Mr. Hay's dinner hour; to which the man is said to have replied, "Oh but, sir, it is his yesterday's dinner"! <sup>204</sup> This is even more suspect:

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that on a certain Sunday afternoon a dinner-party was given at Foss, in Perthshire; and that it was not until the bell was ringing for church on the following Sunday morning that the company, still drinking, realised how time had flown.<sup>205</sup>



## Chapter VI

### Housework and Household Supplies

One day in August 1782 Sir Alexander Dick of Prestonfield wrote in his notes that from three o'clock in the morning until seven his wife and daughter Bess had been making currant wine.<sup>1</sup> That he stated with complete unconcern, as if it was the natural thing to be working at such a time of day. It is true, Scottish people generally did get up early. By seven o'clock in the morning the Edinburgh shops were open. By seven, too, children all over the country were settling down to their lessons; while John Wesley, on his missionary tours, had no trouble at all in attracting large congregations as early as five.<sup>2</sup>

In England, apparently, the zeal for early rising was not so marked. A Prussian minister who was staying at Richmond in 1782, and wanted to make good use of his time, decided at three o'clock one morning that he would go out and look at the scenery. He was at once "particularly sensible of the great inconveniences they sustain in England by their bad custom of rising so late", for nobody else in the house was up, and he could not get out. To his irritated surprise he had to wait until six before a servant came to open the door.<sup>3</sup>

English women were able to get up later, Pehr Kalm might have asserted, because they did hardly any work. (Kalm was a Swede who stayed in England for a short time in 1748 on his way to America.) All they did, so far as he could see, was to cook the food (mostly roast beef and puddings), scour dishes and floors, wash clothes, and sew minute stitches. They seldom had to brew or bake, because beer

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and bread could usually be bought ready-made; weaving and spinning were rarely done at home; and the work in the fields was done by the men. "When one enters a house", he said, "and has seen the women cooking, washing floors, plates and dishes, darning a stocking or sewing a chemise, washing and starching linen clothes, he has, in fact, seen all their household economy and all that they do the whole of God's long day, year out and year in, when to these are added some *visitors*." <sup>4</sup>

By modern standards women so employed would be thought anything but idle. Nevertheless, a good deal more was evidently expected of those of Scandinavia. And in Scotland, too, especially in country districts, the housewife very often did have to brew and bake and spin (although perhaps not to weave) as well as look after the dairy. Until late in the century, moreover, it was the women in Scotland who looked after the sheep and goats,<sup>5</sup> and who either reared horses or made arrangements for borrowing them.<sup>6</sup> On top of it all, according to a certain agricultural writer: "It is their Work with us in Scotland more than the Men's, to cleanse the Cow-stables, and work with Shovels and Dung-forks in pulling out our Dunghills".<sup>7</sup> The *Statistical Account of Scotland* makes frequent reference to such drudgery. Where there were no shops the housewife might have to get ready for wash-day by making her own soap; and, in order to enjoy an evening's relaxation at home, she would probably first have to mould some candles. Altogether one begins to wonder, not why she sometimes had to get up at three in the morning, but how she ever managed to go to bed at all.

In a number of towns, as in England, domestic supplies could be obtained at the weekly market, and the housewife's burden was to some extent eased. In some places, such as Dunfermline, the council built special market-places for meat, meal or other commodities.<sup>8</sup> By 1750 Glasgow had several.<sup>9</sup> The usefulness of the markets varied between one district and another. People complained that the Glasgow ones offered nothing like the variety of those of Edinburgh;

they blamed the wretched state of the roads around Glasgow, which were so ill-kept and narrow that goods from outlying districts could only be brought in sacks or creels on horse-back.<sup>10</sup> But the Edinburgh markets were renowned: by the middle of the century it could be claimed that they were as well stocked as any in Europe, and that prices compared favourably with those elsewhere. "Accordingly, the tables of the citizens, or middling rank of people in Edinburgh, are more plentiful, and shew much greater variety than those of the same rank in London; and men of moderate fortune, choosing to reside in this metropolis, find that they can command luxuries of the table, which in London they would scarcely find within the reach of double the same income." <sup>11</sup>

Some of the weekly markets supplied provisions of all kinds.<sup>12</sup> Others specialised in some local product, such as the green linen produced in Leven (Fife) round about 1770 and sold in the Saturday market there as fast as it could be brought in.<sup>13</sup> The Inverness market was a general one, but to Edward Burt's critical eye it seemed a poor affair. "One has under his arm a small roll of linen," he wrote, "another a piece of coarse plaiding: these are considerable dealers. But the merchandise of the greatest part of them is of a most contemptible value, such as these, *viz.*—two or three cheeses, of about three or four pounds weight apiece; a kid sold for sixpence or eight-pence at the most; a small quantity of butter, in something that looks like a bladder, and is sometimes set down upon the dirt in the street; three or four goat-skins; a piece of wood for an axletree to one of the little carts, *etc.* With the produce of what each of them sells, they generally buy something, *viz.*—a horn, or wooden spoon or two, a knife, a wooden platter, and such-like necessities for their huts, and carry home with them little or no money." <sup>14</sup> Burt's criticism was confirmed, later in the century, by the minister of an Aberdeenshire parish, who complained that country people were so much in the habit of attending a weekly market that they generally lost one day in the week in order to

dispose of an article which would scarcely bring in 1s. 6d.<sup>15</sup> Such time-wasting was not inevitable: the Saturday market at Kirkcaldy began between three and four o'clock in the morning, and was usually over by six, so that people were able to return home in time for their ordinary day's work.<sup>16</sup>

The markets were supplemented, once a year or oftener, by fairs similar to those held in England. They were great occasions. To the head of the family they were opportunities for buying and selling cattle, or for hiring labourers for the coming year. To the housewife they offered such tempting things as "horn-spoons, green and black freckled, with shanks clear as amber", ivory egg-cups of every pattern, and piles of shoes of every kind and size, including little red worsted boots for babies, with blue and white edgings.<sup>17</sup> And for the children there were sweets and gingerbread and parliament cakes and other childhood joys.

The fairs were not confined to the mainland. In Skye, from early times, there were two fairs every year, in June and September; and the products sold there included horses, cows, sheep, goats, hides, skins, wool, butter, cheese and fish.<sup>18</sup> But probably the most famous fair was the annual midsummer one held at Largs, in Ayrshire. That was the great meeting-place of Highlanders and Lowlanders, who made exchanges, and purchased goods, to last throughout the year. Great crowds of people were attracted there, not least for the music and dancing and general hilarity which accompanied the buying and selling. But by the end of the century the fair had begun to lose its importance, because there were now more shops in the Highlands, and travelling chapmen were covering all parts of the country.<sup>19</sup>

In England, quite early in the century, there were a few shopkeepers in every town and in most villages; <sup>20</sup> but not so in Scotland. Glasgow had no provision shops at all at the beginning of the period—only stalls in the road. Even in 1785 its shopping was done on such a homely basis that every transaction was the talk of the town within a few minutes, and any merchant could direct a customer, without

hesitation, to the shop which had what he wanted.<sup>21</sup> In the smaller Lowland towns there was less chance that the customer *would* get what he wanted. Take, for example, Beith, as it was in 1780: there was no clock or watchmaker or milliner; the two clothiers were also haberdashers and linen drapers, hosiers and hat merchants, and one of them sold flax seed as well, with hooks and scythes. There was one baker, who baked once a week; one butcher, who supplied meat only occasionally; no fishmonger (but creels of herrings were sometimes brought by "cadgers" passing through the town); and one bookseller, who also sold stationery and hardware.<sup>22</sup>

In the Highlands and islands there were naturally less facilities still, and shops were few and far between. When Dr. Johnson visited Skye, in 1773, there was no shop at all. The Isle of Coll had one, and Mull two, each of them, as he expressed it, "a repository of everything requisite for common use",<sup>23</sup> or what the ordinary mortal would call a general shop. On the mainland there were many places which even in 1790 were forty miles or more away from a shop or any fixed trading-centre.<sup>24</sup> How glad the inhabitants of such a district must have been to see a pedlar, for his news as much as for his wares, may well be imagined.

Edinburgh itself, although it had its permanent shops and markets, was largely dependent on hawkers for its household supplies. Women used to come regularly from the Musselburgh neighbourhood carrying baskets full of fruit, vegetables or fish on their backs, or loads of sand for washing floors.<sup>25</sup> Manufacturers of roasting-jacks and toasting-forks roamed through the streets crying their wares. Brush-makers brought their besoms and heather ranges. Others brought door-mats, articles of crockery, or balls of blacking (at four for a halfpenny), and hawked them from house to house, each with his distinctive cry. Peat and coal carts were in general demand. And the housewife listened regularly for the cry of "ye-sa", which, with her woman's intuition, she knew to mean that a cartload of yellow sand was on its way, and she wanted some of it to

sprinkle on her stone kitchen floors and on the common stairs to her "lodging".<sup>26</sup>

Paisley, too, relied to a great extent on pedlars, mostly from England. Many of them, having used the town as their trading-centre, later on settled there, bought up the local manufactures and sold them to friends in England.<sup>27</sup> But the chapmen were never more useful than in supplying goods to country districts. Even the gipsy tinkers were welcome, as they ranged far and wide with their horn spoons, smoothing-irons and kettles.<sup>28</sup> So were the horners themselves, who sometimes tramped about carrying tools and supplies of horns in wallets slung over their shoulders, and made spoons to order.<sup>29</sup> But some of the Highland lairds, though willing to buy, were less anxious to pay. One chapman who called to collect a debt was entertained by the laird very hospitably, and pressed to stay the night; but in the morning he was somewhat alarmed to see the body of a dead man hanging outside his window. A servant told him casually that it was the body of a Lowland merchant who had come to dun the laird for the payment of a debt, which had put the laird in such a passion that he had had the insolent fellow hanged. Distinctly startled at the idea, the chapman decided that it would be politic not to say why he had called, and departed rather hurriedly—whereupon the laird, highly satisfied, took down the body (a straw one) for use in the next emergency.<sup>30</sup>

Those who could afford to buy goods which were not to be had locally, often obtained them through an agent in Edinburgh or at one of the ports. Simon, Lord Lovat, used to write from Beaufort to his agent in Edinburgh for nearly everything he wanted, from fiddle strings to sago for his supper;<sup>31</sup> and many other people did the same. But Lady Strathnaver once received a consignment which she did *not* want, and very annoyed she was about it: "Andrew Frigge", she wrote (in 1711), "You sent here a barrell of prunes without any commission from me, which I would have thought the less of provyded they had been good, but the lyke of them I never saw—not worth a penny the

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pound are they, which is meer imposition to send here goods that no body will take, or as if payment was never expected.”<sup>32</sup>

Many of the purchases were from England or the Continent. The Grants of Monymusk, in the 'thirties, used to buy quite trivial items from London: sewing-needles, for instance, nails, and black pencils (at six for a shilling). On one occasion, getting ready for some odd jobs about the house, they bought from there a hammer, a file, a pair of pincers, two gimlets, six pulleys and screws and two dozen wooden screws, all for 2s. 3d. (Why they sent to London is hard to guess; they apparently had no difficulty in buying such things as hammers, nails and curtain-rings near home.<sup>33</sup>) They obtained their food locally, but some Edinburgh gentlemen sent to England for their meat, finding it cheaper and better—which, said an agricultural reformer, should rouse the shame and indignation of all Scots.<sup>34</sup> There was a better case for importing fruit, and in the second half of the century large quantities of apples and pears were in fact brought from England to Glasgow, where they sold at 1d. to 3d. a pound.<sup>35</sup> And naturally, until Scottish industry became fully developed, there was a big demand for English manufactured goods such as crockery, grinding-stones, spades and shovels, which were brought regularly from Newcastle to Perth.<sup>36</sup> One of the principal Scottish traders, William Forsyth of Cromarty, who began in a small way in 1740, at first dealt almost exclusively with Holland, bringing in tea, wine, spices, glass, cloth, delft ware, Flemish tiles and pieces of japanned cabinet work; but later on he dealt chiefly with Leith, London and Newcastle.<sup>37</sup> And by 1760 three or four ships a year came from London to Cromarty bringing groceries and hops.<sup>38</sup>

Imports from abroad included wine and groceries and a great variety of luxury goods, such as silk, jewellery and Venetian glass.<sup>39</sup> But difficulties of transport within Scotland prevented many a housewife from obtaining them. And although, for instance, the consumption of sugar

increased on direct trade being opened with the West Indies, even after 1760 the sugar-loaf in many families was still a luxury to be locked up in the housewife's press with the sixpenny loaf of bread.<sup>40</sup>

Lady Grisell Baillie and other visitors to the Continent brought back ornaments and all kinds of useful additions to their homes. Unfortunately their various friends, knowing where they were going, made themselves rather a nuisance with long lists of things they wanted brought back for them. Awkward things they were to carry, some of them, such as "ane anker of Course Olive Oil for burning in lamps"—to be brought all the way from Italy.<sup>41</sup>

The mention of lists calls to mind the difficulties traders must have had in deciphering some of their customers' orders. When in 1712-14 the Laird of Thunderton ordered "ane pound coffie bens" and "ane English Cheasser cheess"<sup>42</sup> it was easy to guess what he wanted. But some of the ladies were notoriously bad spellers even by eighteenth-century standards, and their grocery lists could have been none too easy to read. One order went badly wrong: Henrietta Nairne, on receiving an urgent message to go from Gask to the sick-bed of her sister, Lady Lude, sent a note to Perth ordering the largest chaise that could be found. In due course two men arrived staggering under the weight of an enormous cheese.<sup>43</sup>

Shopping habits of Scottish and English women differed most as regards the quantities bought at a time. One of Galt's most amusing characters, Mrs. Pringle, of *The Ayrshire Legatees*, was disgusted with the hand-to-mouth existence of London housewives. "We just buy our tea by the quarter of a pound," she wrote, describing London customs, "and our loaf sugar, broken in a peper bag, by the pound, which would be a disgrace to a decent family in Scotland; and when we order dinner, we get no more than just serves, so that we have no cold meat if a stranger were coming by chance, which makes an unco bare house." Londoners were lucky, of course, in having shops close at hand. Scottish people living miles away from a shop or market had no



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alternative but to lay in large stocks of provisions; but for townsfolk the need was not so great.

In spite of the comments of the fictitious Mrs. Pringle, the Duke of Argyll's tea, round about 1780, was bought for him in Edinburgh a quarter of a pound at a time, or at the most half a pound.<sup>44</sup> Most things, in Edinburgh, could be bought in small quantities; and considering the cramped quarters in which the greater part of the population had to live it was just as well that they could. Butter and cheese, candles, starch and soap could all be bought by the pound, and Sir John Foulis's account-book shows that that was how they were bought for his household. Lady Grisell Baillie, too, at times bought sugar and other commodities a few pounds at a time. But much of her buying was for her country house at Mellerstain, and, as a prudent housewife, she laid in large stocks—two stone of cheese at a time, eight stone or more of butter, two stone of rice, a stone of figs and raisins, and a whole barrel of herrings, besides "5 duson of limons to be joyce". For some reason she usually chose to buy on the same scale while in Edinburgh: she would buy a stone of candles at once; and on one occasion, having bought a hundred pounds of starch, she had to buy some casks to put it in. Similarly with oddments such as sealing-wax: where Sir John contented himself with buying a stick at a time, or perhaps a red one and a black one, Lady Grisell chose to buy half a pound. And in 1715, for some reason, she had seven stone of pearl barley sent to her in London from Edinburgh.<sup>45</sup>

In the more inaccessible districts commercial supplies were precarious, but here and there various minor aids to housekeeping were to be had for the taking. In Shetland and the northern counties, for instance, great quantities of sponges lay on the shore ready to pick up <sup>46</sup> (elsewhere they cost about 10d. sterling each<sup>47</sup>). In the west the cockles to be found in vast numbers, though not always appreciated as food, were valued for their shells: they made a very good white lime used in whitewashing houses.<sup>48</sup> Caithness had pits of bright yellow ochre which, mixed with a little glue,

answered well for painting the walls of rooms.<sup>49</sup> In addition, great masses of feathers and down came from the sea-birds all round the coast, and especially in the western isles. The inhabitants of Lewis used to visit the adjacent smaller islands every summer to collect large quantities,<sup>50</sup> and in St. Kilda the whole of the rents (about £40 altogether) were paid in feathers instead of in money, still leaving a surplus for sale.<sup>51</sup> The selling-price, near the end of the century, was about 9d. a pound.<sup>52</sup> Rent-payments in feathers might be a little unusual, but the general principle of payment in kind was widely accepted. Sometimes cash was a very small proportion of the whole rent. To give a few examples : about 1715 the total rent due to the Earl of Winton was roughly £3393, of which only about £266 had to be paid in money. The rest was payable in wheat, barley, oats, straw, capons (794½ of them), hens (802½), salt and coal. James Stirling of Keir had £625 of his £907 rents in money. For the rest he had 19 geese, 184 capons, 530 hens, 2 stone of cheese, 4 pounds of butter and quantities of barley, oatmeal and malt. Lord Drummond, on the other hand, had only £546 of his £2566 rents paid in kind, but the sum comprised a wonderful assortment: 96½ wethers, 40 lambs, 129 geese, 341½ chickens, 465 capons, 37 hens, 1488 "poultry", 196 dozen eggs, 30 winterings, 33 kids, 11 swine, 21½ stone of cheese, 90¾ pints and 10 stone of butter, 78 yards of linen, 19 pecks of nuts, 5 pairs of creels, 800 loads of peats, and the rest in barley, oats and meal.<sup>53</sup>

During the course of the century many of the involved rents were commuted to money payments. But as late as 1798 rent in the Aberdeen district was still being paid partly in poultry, although an alternative money rent was fixed.<sup>54</sup> There were similar survivals elsewhere. On some estates in Angus, for instance, the tenants were still bound to provide and build up for their proprietor enough peat to last him the year (a task which sometimes took most of the summer) and also to fetch from the neighbouring ports all the coal he required.<sup>55</sup> In Caithness, too, some of the tenants were still paying the usual rent in kind and in the form of labour-

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services; and those on the sea coast had also to pay "teind and quatel" of fish and oil out of each boat belonging to them.<sup>56</sup>

There was sometimes good reason for those services to continue, especially in the Highlands. Where markets were few and distant the large household which could not manage on the produce of the home farm found it most convenient to obtain supplies from tenants. The system was at times a great nuisance to the tenant: he sometimes had to take his grain, for instance, fifteen miles or more to deliver it, and disputes were apt to arise on its quality. But even for the tenant it was probably the best arrangement which could be devised. In the lack of a local market it was difficult for him to sell his grain, so it was rather convenient to pay rents in it. It really meant that on the great estates the landlord himself had to act as a large-scale corn merchant, not always very profitably to himself.<sup>57</sup>

The more isolated Highland households, and remote groups of people elsewhere, had to be almost entirely self-supporting. Where there was no shop within forty or fifty miles, and no easy means of communication, the risk of relying on bought supplies would have been too great. Life at Rothiemurchus, as it was described by Elizabeth Grant, was typical of such districts: "We were so remote from markets that we had to depend very much on our own produce for some of the necessities of life. Our flocks and herds supplied us not only with the chief part of our food, but with fleeces to be woven into clothing, blanketing and carpets, horn for spoons, leather to be dressed at home for various purposes, hair for the masons, lint seed was sown to grow into sheeting, shirting, sacking, etc. . . . We brewed our own beer, made our bread, made our candles; nothing was brought from afar but wine, groceries, and flour, wheat not ripening so far from the sea. Yet we lived in luxury. Game was so plentiful, red deer, roe, hares, grouse, ptarmigan and partridge; the river provided trout and salmon, the different lochs pike and char; the garden abounded in common fruits and vegetables, cranberries and raspberries

ran over the countryside and the poultry yard was ever well furnished." <sup>58</sup> When the Highlanders did have to fetch provisions from the Lowlands they usually formed themselves into bands and set off with about a hundred little ponies. Having little money, they took with them small kegs of whisky to use as barter. For the return journey the ponies were each loaded with a boll of meal, or whatever they had been to fetch, and they travelled in single file, the head of one animal being fastened to the tail of another. <sup>59</sup>

In the lonely Highland districts, as Adam Smith pointed out, every farmer had to be butcher, baker and brewer for his own family. A smith, carpenter or mason was hardly ever to be found within twenty miles of another. That meant that many scattered families had to do all kinds of jobs for which they would otherwise have called in workmen. It meant, too, that the country carpenter was expected to do any kind of work connected with timber and the smith everything to do with iron. <sup>60</sup> Similarly, in the western Hebrides it was common to find men who were tailors, shoe-makers, stocking-weavers, coopers, carpenters and sawyers of timber; they made fish-hooks, and also metal buckles, brooches and rings for their wives; some even made their own boats. <sup>61</sup>

On the whole, as the Highlanders were used to a hard life, they were not discontented. In the late eighteenth century, indeed, Mrs. Anne Grant, wife of the pastor of Laggan, accounted herself very fortunate: the farm attached to the manse provided all necessities, and from time to time she could send to Inverness, "only fifty miles off", for "elegancies and superfluities". The so-called superfluities included tea and sugar. <sup>62</sup>

Self-supporting households must have stored a tremendous bulk of goods. Barns and other outhouses, at certain times of the year, must have been full to overflowing, and the house itself must sometimes have been cluttered up with supplies. For our admonition, the slipshod lady of fiction, Mrs. MacClarty, had her spare bedroom "cram fou o' woo'; it was put in there the day of the sheep-shearing,

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and we have never ta'en the fash to put it by" <sup>63</sup> (though where else she was to put it, in a small house, is a mystery). But most store-rooms were probably like Admiral Fairfax's at Burntisland, as neat as hers was untidy. His was a long garret filled with presses and with all kinds of provisions, among them being a number of cheeses which lay on a board slung by ropes to the rafters. If at dead of night there was a violent crash followed by a noise of heavy rolling, it meant no more than that the rats had gnawed through the ropes and sent the cheeses on their merry way.<sup>64</sup>

Of all the bulky commodities to store, a year's supply of fuel must have been one of the worst. That was ostensibly why the inhabitants of Stornoway, who towards the end of the century had fifty new houses built for them with sixty-foot gardens at the back, clamoured to have the gardens doubled in size. Their peat, they said, took up such a large amount of space that they must have more room for it.<sup>65</sup>

It is clear that most housewives had plenty to occupy their minds and hands. Here is an account of an ordinary Monday in a typical eighteenth-century Highland household. It was summer time, and the outdoor servants had already taken the cattle to the glens. On Mondays they came down for supplies. One servant arrived with a horse loaded with butter, cheese and milk, and the housewife had to weigh the butter straight away. The man wanted to take back with him an extra blanket, milk tubs, two stone of meal and a quart of salt; and he announced that if the grass continued so good that they decided to stay longer he would want another two pounds of flax for the spinners. He reported that the sow had had a litter of a dozen pigs, so he required extra feeding-stuffs. All those things he wanted within an hour, so that he could start on his way back. Meanwhile another servant arrived from tending the sheep and horses on the high hills, and wanted meal and salt; he asked for women to come and clip the lambs, and needed a supply of tar for smearing. Then the tenants came to do their labour-dues, perhaps to spend two days in the wood cutting timber; and they had to be provided

with bread, cheese and ale for the whole time. Besides all that there were the household meals to prepare, the children's lessons to hear and samplers to put right, and countless other duties to fill up the day. The housewife was lucky if she could allow herself a quiet walk in the evening as a rest from her labours.<sup>66</sup>

In every household, of course, cooking took up some part of every day. Just as regularly came the inevitable washing-up. Mrs. Hamilton suggested that it was often scamped. Her Mrs. MacClarty, rebuked for the dirty state of her milk churn, said boldly: "Naebody hereabouts would clean their kirn for ony consideration. I never heard o' sic a thing i' my life."<sup>67</sup> Edward Burt, too, accused Scottish housewives of being too cautious of wearing out their household utensils by cleaning them, choosing rather to let their pewter gradually take on the colour of lead. He told, with malicious amusement, of a woman who lent his cook a pewter pudding-pan. The cook promised to clean it before returning it, whereupon the woman cried, "Lord! you'll wear it out!" When she found that the pan had been scoured before it was used she lost all patience, saying that she had had it for fifteen years and it had never been washed before; and she swore that she would never again lend it to an English family.<sup>68</sup>

Spiteful generalisations are never wholly true. Lady Grisell Baillie, at all events, was determined to have her tableware cleaned regularly. She wrote detailed instructions for her butler, in 1743, stipulating that the plate should be washed in soap suds, and not smeared with whitening, and any spots on it should be removed with spirit of wine, and finally it was to be polished with a brush and a piece of chamois leather. And he was to see that dirty bottles were soaked in water in which wood ashes had been boiled.<sup>69</sup> It was all part of a regular routine, as it doubtless was in many a household, although on festive occasions it might be necessary to hire special labour for such tasks as cleaning pewter and copper.<sup>70</sup>

Lady Grisell was equally insistent that the butler should

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keep the pantry, cellar and larder clean. "If things are allowed to run into dirt and confusion," she wrote in her memorandum to him, "double the time and pains will not set it right, and every thing that stands in dirty places will soon grow musty and stinking and unfit to be used."<sup>71</sup> Not everyone would have agreed. It was a common saying in Inverness and elsewhere that a clean kitchen was a sign of poor housekeeping; and it was held to bring bad luck to new tenants if a family moving from a house cleaned up before leaving.<sup>72</sup>

Eighteenth-century standards of cleanliness left much to be desired, and Mrs. Hamilton was probably justified in calling attention to the slovenliness of some of the cottagers.<sup>73</sup> Smollett, too, describing conditions in Edinburgh, was probably right in saying that the common stairways of the tall houses were filthy, although the individual apartments were remarkably tidy.<sup>74</sup> But whereas one English traveller, in the 'eighties, found Inverness, Nairn and Forres very dirty and Elgin worse than any of them,<sup>75</sup> another, at the same time, found the Lowland houses squalid but the Highland ones respectably clean.<sup>76</sup> According to Dr. Johnson, it would be wrong in any case to reproach the Highlanders for lack of cleanliness: their servants, who had been bred upon the naked earth, could not be expected to know a clean floor from a dirty one.<sup>77</sup> However, tourists are liable to be prejudiced. It is good to come across a really positive statement such as this, to Sir Archibald Grant, in 1735, from his factor in Monymusk: "I have caused clean the house from top to bottom, with the windows, chimneys, locks and keys".<sup>78</sup>

Dr. Johnson evidently had no great opinion of the Scottish method of washing floors. It was not as a rule done on hands and knees, but with a mop (the price of which, in 1735, was about 1s. sterling).<sup>79</sup> But what often happened was that the maidservant dipped a cloth in water and spread it on the floor; then, tucking up her clothes, she stood on it and shuffled it backwards and forwards with her bare feet, repeating the process until she had gone all over

the room. To finish it off she washed the cloth, spread it again, and shuffled round once more ; and that soaked up the rest of the water.<sup>80</sup> It was a vigorous way of saving trouble, and the English maids who scrubbed away every morning at their kitchen floors and staircases<sup>81</sup> were probably less tired in the long run. However that might be, Scottish housewives were convinced that theirs was the correct way. One of them, staying in Hanover in 1708, was disgusted at the state of a newly washed room she saw there, "or rather a room that has been laid under water, for they know no other way of washing".<sup>82</sup> And similarly the *Scots Magazine*, describing Dutch customs, much later in the century, deplored the ever-present pail and scrubbing-brush as the great menace of Holland: visitors there, it complained, were regularly shown into a room whose floor had just been washed. Intending tourists were recommended, therefore, to double their defences by wearing an extra pair of socks.<sup>83</sup>

To make stone floors and staircases less slippery after being washed it was usual to sprinkle them with sand. That explains a remarkable item in the Duke of Argyll's accounts for 1782: "To a cart of sea sand for the stars 1.4".<sup>84</sup> Sand might be all right on the old-fashioned kitchen floors, but for a sitting-room in a modern house it was hardly suitable. A certain Glasgow gentleman, in the middle of the century, decided that his floors, too, wanted something to finish them off after washing. They were made of deal. To give them a rich brown colour, accordingly, he emptied on them a few bottles of porter. Altogether this original stain cost only about 1s. 4d., but it gave him the reputation of being an extravagant person who regularly washed the floors of his house with porter.<sup>85</sup>

In the old-style houses of the Highlands and elsewhere, with their floors of bare earth, washing them was obviously out of the question—it would simply have reduced them to mud, as the rain did every time it came in. All that could be done was to sweep them, usually with a heather besom.<sup>86</sup>

After the floors were tidied there was the dusting to do,



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and the books to flick with a feather brush or a bushy fox-tail.<sup>87</sup> Then the maid would bring out the brick-dust, English fashion, to clean the candlesticks, brass plates and similar oddments; <sup>88</sup> and now and then she might have to go and look for a feather in order to oil a lock.<sup>89</sup> The pictures she would most likely leave untouched, apart from dusting the frames; but one artist, anxious that his masterpieces should not be spoiled, made a note on the back of the account which he rendered to Sir Archibald Campbell of Cawdor, in 1722, describing the correct way to clean them. "Take fair water and a brush", he wrote, "and brush them lightly till you find the dirt comes off, then with a clean sponge wyepe them. Afterward wash them once or twice with clear water, then dry them with a linnen cloath; when perfectly dry, take the white of an egg, beat it to a froath, then with a clean sponge doe them all over and let them dry where no dust is." <sup>90</sup>

The domestic staff of a country house might also have to sweep the chimneys (Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk used to pay his man Sam 1s. sterling a time for "chimney sweepen" <sup>91</sup>); but in the towns chimney-sweeping was already a specialised occupation. Sir John Foulis used to employ the "sutie-men", as they were called, regularly in his Edinburgh house. "Were it not for getting their faces blacked like savages", the writer of *Mansie Wauch* soliloquised, "a sweep is not such a bad trade after a'; though, to be sure, going down lums six stories high, head foremost, and landing upon the soles of their feet upon the hearth-stone, like a kittlin, is no' just so pleasant." <sup>92</sup> It looks as if the one advantage of the typical Highland hut (and that a doubtful one) was that having no chimney it required no sweep.

One of the most tiresome jobs in the house was to provide some form of lighting. Dr. Johnson was much impressed to find that on the Isle of Coll every household made its own candles, and everybody knew how to extract lamp-oil from the cuddy; <sup>93</sup> but actually, without those accomplishments or similar ones, many a Scottish family would have had to

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sit in the dark. Townsfolk might be able to buy candles by the pound, but people elsewhere, if they had them at all, normally made their own with the tallow from the mart or with the beeswax from their own hives. They could use tallow either for moulded candles or for dips. Moulded ones were made by fixing a wick down a pewter tube and pouring in the tallow. (Wicks, in 1735, cost 1s. or 2s. sterling a pound, according to quality.<sup>94</sup>) To make "dips" several wicks were stretched upon a frame, dipped in a trough of tallow, and then cooled, and the process was repeated often enough to give the required thickness. The more aristocratic wax candles were a little more trouble to make: the wicks had to be suspended over a basin and melted wax poured over them; and when they were sufficiently thick they had to be rolled, while hot, between two pieces of wood.<sup>95</sup> They were all simple processes enough, but the noisome smell of the tallow or wax must have filled the house. The Corporation of Edinburgh might push the local tallow-works farther and farther afield as the city grew, but the individual housewife had no such means of driving away the stench.

Any tallow left over was useful for making soap, as long and unpleasant a job as candle-making. The first business was to collect a large supply of the other ingredients. Fern and bracken were the most usual, being the easiest to obtain. Other possibilities were oak, ash, beech, thorns, juniper, whins, nettles, thistles, "stinking weed", hemlock and seaweed. They had to be kindled with twigs and burnt to ashes, which were afterwards sifted and packed into barrels to preserve the salts. To make white soap the housewife had to take five pints of the lye of the ashes (made by mixing them with lime and pouring water on them) and four pounds of tallow. Next she had to add salt and boil the mixture for several hours; and in due course the soap appeared in the form of a scum, which she skimmed off and put in a box to cool.<sup>96</sup>

There was everything to be said for buying soap ready-made, where that was possible. Lady Grisell Baillie evidently

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thought so: her household book shows that for her Mellerstain house she bought about 230 pounds a year. But the Murray family at Ochtertyre, in the eastern Highlands, apparently bought no soap at all, judging by their accounts for the year 1737-38;<sup>97</sup> and there must have been many country households, while communications were so bad, which had to rely entirely on home supplies.

In remote districts of Wales the housewife had to eke out her supplies of soap by using fern ash kneaded into balls.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, in Scotland, shortage of tallow or other suitable fatty substances made it necessary sometimes to use the lye on its own as a substitute for soap. As it happened, that was regarded by the French as the correct and normal practice, so that a French visitor to England, early in the century, was rather perturbed to find that in London and other places where wood was not burnt people did not make lye, but washed their linen with soap. But he was fairly well reconciled to the idea when he found that "When you are in a Place where the Linnen can be rinc'd in any large Water, the Stink of the black Soap is almost all clear'd away".<sup>99</sup>

For washing woollen blankets, carpets and arras hangings the experts recommended that the articles should first be soaked in a tub of lye. The next process was to pour on a lather of white soap and warm water "and let a woman tramp it with her feet for about half an hour". The lather was then to be changed and the tramping repeated until all the dirt was out. Then the articles were to be rinsed in cold water and hung out to dry.<sup>100</sup>

This energetic way of washing, with the woman tucking up her skirts, getting into the tub and trampling on the linen with her bare feet, was the regular method throughout Scotland for the greater part of the century. English travellers were fascinated at the sight. Some were shocked, and turned hastily away; but their embarrassment served only to make the bolder lasses hitch their skirts a little higher and, with mischievous glances, kick with greater vigour.<sup>101</sup> Other passers-by were full of admiration for the

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"trampers". In fact, the Earl of Oxford, who saw them for the first time in 1725, stayed to watch them, and was convinced that they got through more work than two or three women washing in the ordinary way.<sup>102</sup> Had he but known, there was a quicker method still: two women would sometimes stamp in one and the same tub, supporting themselves by throwing their arms over one another's shoulders,<sup>103</sup> and in that way they finished the job in half the time.

The ordinary small house had little room for so much splashing. That partly explains why washing was regularly done out of doors. But the main reason, in many cases, was probably that it was easier to take the washing to the water than to bring the water to the washing. Accordingly, just as in Sweden the servants took their linen to the river to wash,<sup>104</sup> in Inverness and other parts of Scotland the washerwomen carried their tubs to the nearest stretch of water, even in frosty weather when their legs and feet were red with cold.<sup>105</sup>

In due course certain spots came to be recognised as regular washing-grounds. In Dunfermline, for instance, housewives used the north side of Tower Hill as a place for washing, drying and bleaching.<sup>106</sup> For Glasgow there were two centres: the Low Green for the inhabitants of the eastern districts and Dowcot Green for the west-enders. A score or more women would occupy the washing-house on one of the greens at one time, and, round about 1730, even well-to-do ladies "tramped the tub" there with the ordinary washerwomen.<sup>107</sup> By 1760 things were much easier: the Low Green washing-house was by then equipped with furnaces, and boiling water could be bought by the measure.<sup>108</sup>

In the 'nineties the Low Green "washery" had become "a large reeking edifice; from the threshold of which", an interested tourist recalled, "we beheld some hundreds of females, within the inclosure, all in the busy acts of rubbing, scrubbing, scouring, dipping, and wringing all sorts of linen clothes".<sup>109</sup> A few years later Dorothy Wordsworth passed by the green, and was also struck by the number of women

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with their "arms, head and face all in motion".<sup>110</sup> Tramping, in Glasgow, was evidently a thing of the past. But by then the wooden dolly-tub was on the market.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to suggest that its inventor had been inspired by the sight of some Scottish washer-lass twirling around in her tub.

The old custom died out more slowly in remote areas. At Rothiemurchus, it is true, towards the end of the century clothes were not trampled but thumped, in the Indian and French fashion, with a bottle-shaped piece of wood known as a "beetle".<sup>112</sup> But in Campbeltown, as late as 1820, the public laundry on the banks of a small stream was described as "displaying all the well-known variety which results from blazing fires, huge black kettles, smoke, linen, tubs, bare legs and arms, and merriment",<sup>113</sup> which rather suggests that legs still played their part in the operation.

The washing was usually laid to dry on the green, among the grazing cattle, or hung on bushes;<sup>114</sup> but Edinburgh housewives, suffering as usual from lack of space, had to hang it out of the window on a projecting pole, in full view of the passers-by.<sup>115</sup> The airing was done at the fireside in the ordinary way.<sup>116</sup> That, incidentally, was one of the "peculiar customs" which impressed a Belgian servant on coming to England. "It filled me with secret astonishment", he recorded, "that English people should fancy to have their bedclothes roasted."<sup>117</sup>

If the actual washing was rather rough and ready, the finishing processes were even more so. Starch became generally available as potatoes came into cultivation: there was a simple process of extracting it for family use.<sup>118</sup> But there were said to be few domestic servants capable of dressing linen—most of them did no more than smoothe it in the mangle. Frilly articles, such as ladies' caps and gentlemen's best shirts, could not be entrusted to them at all; the lady's maid or the housekeeper had to iron them herself.<sup>119</sup> The slowest things of all to iron were the shirts, with their numerous tiny pleats.<sup>120</sup> The Grants of Monymusk were fortunate in 1735 in being able to buy six smoothing-

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irons and a box iron, with three heaters, for all of which they paid 17s. 1d. sterling.<sup>121</sup> Elsewhere the smoothing-“iron” was frequently nothing but a six-inch stone, weighing about three pounds, which the laundry-woman had to heat and then hold by a wooden handle. That was the difficult state of affairs in many parts of the Highlands, as well as in the outer islands.<sup>122</sup> Even worse was the plight of those washerwomen who had neither mangle nor smoothing-iron of any kind. The best they could do (and what, in Jedburgh, they were actually in the habit of doing) was to take their linen to the churchyard, spread it on the flat tombstones and batter it vigorously with a wooden roller.<sup>123</sup>

Such rough treatment could scarcely have been good for fine linen; but, if we are to believe Lady Lucie Stuart, French methods were still rougher. In 1714 she wrote to her mother from the Parisian convent in which she was being educated and complained of the time it took to mend her “linings”, “for the way that they have of washing ’em tears ’em all to peacis”.<sup>124</sup>

Washing was not yet a regular weekly institution in either England or Scotland. The Rev. James Woodforde’s household in Norfolk, which may be taken as representative, did its washing approximately once in five weeks; and in that time there was such an accumulation that for several days all social invitations had to be declined, “being washing week”.<sup>125</sup> Lady Grisell Baillie’s laundry arrangements certainly show more system, although even she kept dirty linen lying about longer than we should nowadays, and her servants had to wait a month for clean sheets. She had a regular three-weekly rota: in the first week the body-linen was washed and in the next the table- and bed-linen; but in the third week the laundry-maids did no washing at all, but had to spend their whole time spinning.<sup>126</sup> It looks as if eighteenth-century wash-days were formidable affairs, for when the Duke of Argyll’s household had a series of them in 1782, while at Holyrood, he bought in readiness half a hundredweight of soap, ten pounds of starch

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and a pound and a half of blue. He paid a woman for four days' washing, and also paid separately for laundering ten window-curtains, four bed-curtains, a dozen tablecloths, eight dozen napkins, towels and pillow-slips, as well as for "manglen 4 beds".<sup>127</sup>

Hugo Arnot, writing in the 'eighties, noted with some awe that the last Archbishop of Glasgow put on a clean shirt every week.<sup>128</sup> In his opinion it was the new habit of changing underclothes frequently which had made people less liable to disease. By then there were professional laundresses in Edinburgh, Glasgow and other towns. Their charges seem to have been rather high. For instance, the Aberdeenshire washerwoman who laundered Sir Archibald Grant's shirts in 1747 charged 1½d. sterling for plain ones and 2d. for the ruffled variety, although she washed the commoner kind worn by his servants for 1d.<sup>129</sup> Edinburgh washing-bills in 1770 included the following items (all in sterling): tablecloths, 1¼d. each; napkins, 2d. a dozen; pillowslips, ½d. each; a bed-cover, 3d.; sheets, 2d. a pair; stockings, 5d. a dozen pairs; and towels, 1½d. a dozen.<sup>130</sup>

Most of the comments one reads are about washing "linens", and it is fairly evident that woollen clothes were seldom washed at all. It would have been surprising if they had been: such things as scarlet cloth stockings with gold or silver gussets would look none too good after immersion in a wash-tub. The housewife could usually remove unsightly spots with fuller's earth. What was equally good, if she could get it, was a fattish kind of stone called claber, found in Shetland.<sup>131</sup>

Washing, cooking and all the other routine jobs being finished, the provident mistress filled her spare moments with spinning, and saw that her daughters and maids did the same. The ordinary household, in consequence, had a far greater stock of sheets and table linen than an English family of the same rank.<sup>132</sup> Spinning really became something of a fetish. Admittedly, while the distaff and spindle were used it was probably hard work to spin all the yarn that was required, especially when it was to be sold to

supplement the family income. But in Dunfermline and elsewhere distaff spinning began to decline as early as 1730.<sup>133</sup> By 1760 the spinning-wheel was to be found everywhere except in the remote Highlands and islands,<sup>134</sup> with the result that a woman could spin four times as much in a day as she did before.<sup>135</sup> That being so, it looks as if the Countess of Leven was simply striving for effect when, driving in her carriage late in the century, she had her little brass spinning-wheel hanging from her belt so that she could spin industriously all the way.<sup>136</sup> Or maybe she believed, as lesser housewives did, that it was a sin to sit with her hands unoccupied, or to allow her underlings to do so either. One can well sympathise with the husband's point of view, as expressed by Galt's clergyman, the Rev. Micah Balwhidder: "Often could I have found it in my heart to have banned that never-ceasing industry, and to tell Mrs. Balwhidder, that the married state was made for something else than to make napery and beetle blankets; but it was her happiness to keep all at work".<sup>137</sup>

That was the point. It was the *housewife's* happiness—certainly not the maid's. Lady Grisell Baillie was well aware of that. She directed her housekeeper to keep the laundry-maids, dairymaid, housemaid and kitchen-maid fully occupied with spinning whenever they were not busy on something more important, "which", she warned her, "they will often pretend to be if they are not diligently lookt after and keep to it".<sup>138</sup> It was quite true that the servant class had a natural disinclination to spin, even though, given the choice, some of them would have preferred to spin full-time rather than go to domestic service at all.<sup>139</sup> The spinning-schools which were erected in various parts of the country during the 'sixties were at first by no means so popular as they were expected to be. The one at Braemar, for instance, was regarded at the beginning with a good deal of prejudice.<sup>140</sup> In Stornoway no voluntary pupils were forthcoming at all, and attendance was made compulsory. In order to escape from it large numbers of the young women straightway got married, including some who were



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only twelve years old; but marriage was, after all, not accepted as an excuse, and they had to submit to their unwelcome lessons. Fortunately, they managed to cheer themselves up by singing lustily as they learned them.<sup>141</sup> ("Music while you work" is no new idea. Throughout the Highlands in the eighteenth century almost every kind of task which occupied more than one person, whether milking cows, grinding corn, hay-making or whatever else, had its appropriate song, just as sailors everywhere had their shanties. "These songs and tunes", noted an English traveller, "re-animate, for a time, the drooping labourer, and make him work with redoubled ardour."<sup>142</sup>)

Dr. Johnson, while touring the Highlands, enquired whether weaving had ever been a domestic art there to the same extent as spinning and knitting. Nobody could tell him; but he was probably right in reasoning that in remote districts it must have been.<sup>143</sup> But wherever there was a community of people it was obviously economical for one of the men to specialise as a weaver, and by the middle of the century, if not before, that was the regular practice. By the 'nineties there was an adequate supply of weavers, with sometimes eight or nine of them to a parish of less than a thousand people;<sup>144</sup> but that did not prevent prices from rising—the charge for weaving one kind of cloth in Lethnot rose from 1d. an ell in 1750 to 3d. in 1790.<sup>145</sup>

The arrangements with the weaver varied between one family and another. Sometimes the whole of the yarn was handed over to him with instructions as to the type of cloth wanted. Lord Fife, for instance, wrote to his factor in 1782, "Do tell Rachel that I want the maids to spin yarn in order to make a suite of Damask for a dessert—a large table cloth and fourteen napkins. I intend to have them with the arms and wove at Edinburgh."<sup>146</sup> In Admiral Fairfax's household at Burntisland the yarn was sorted out: the coarser was woven locally, but the fine was sent to Dunfermline to be dealt with more professionally.<sup>147</sup> Most weavers took in "customary" work, sorting the yarns which were handed to them according to their suitability for the various materials

(damask, sheeting, towelling, and so on), and substituting yarn of their own for any which was coarse or uneven. But it became most general for the weaver to exchange the family's yarn outright for finished cloth.<sup>148</sup>

The charge for bleaching, in the 'thirties, was less than  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. sterling a yard.<sup>149</sup> But sometimes the linen cloth was brought home in its brown state and laid aside to be home-bleached in the summer.<sup>150</sup> Many people preferred to do that rather than let their linen be weakened by the new chemicals. Ladies who were really proud of their table-linen at one time sent it to Holland to be bleached, but the custom was abandoned early in the century.<sup>151</sup> Doubts arose as to Dutch methods: people suspected that the bleachers beat the cloth excessively and used too much lime, "so that if the Dutch Linen exceeds that of the Scotch and Irish in Colour, the latter must excel theirs in Thickness and Wear".<sup>152</sup> According to Mrs. Calderwood, who went to Holland in 1756, the methods were then the same in both countries: the cloth was boiled, laid out in the sun, watered repeatedly for several days and finally steeped in sour milk. But the Dutch had the advantages of duty-free soap and potash, less uncertain weather and softer water.<sup>153</sup>

Mary Wollstonecraft recorded that while she was in Sweden she seldom passed a group of cottages without seeing cloth laid out to bleach.<sup>154</sup> She could have said the same of parts of Scotland, but the Highlanders often exposed their new linen to bleach, for weeks at a time, in places where it could not be watched.<sup>155</sup> As a rule it was perfectly safe, but one family, in 1752, lost £60 worth in that way.<sup>156</sup> Elsewhere the local drying-grounds were used, where somebody was always on duty to prevent theft. But the more populous districts had drawbacks of a different kind. A notice in the *Glasgow Journal* in 1775 reads: "The inhabitants of Finnieston request of those gentlemen who send their horses to the fields for exercise, that they will desire their servants not to ride through the village in such crowds, and at such speed, as has been done for some time past.

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The bleachfields, from the quantities of dust dispersed by the horses, are almost ruined.”<sup>157</sup>

Woollen cloth required no bleaching, but it had to be fulled, or walked. In Mull, Skye, and many parts of the Highlands, as soon as a housewife received a piece of cloth from the weaver she called upon a dozen or so of her women neighbours to come and help; and they came without question, probably glad of a few hours' sociability. They first sat round a table and rubbed the cloth hard against a board, squeezing it and folding it until it was close and soft. Then they put the board on the floor with the cloth on it, sat round it and worked it with their feet, singing Gaelic songs the whole time to prevent their energies from flagging.<sup>158</sup> It was quicker, of course, to send the material to the local walk-mill, where there was one; but although there were a good many of them in some parts of Scotland there were large stretches of country with none at all.

In the early years, and throughout the century in the more remote districts, any dyeing required had to be done at home. The women were very skilful in extracting colour from the local plants—yellow from heath, red from moss, reddish purple from lichen, yellowish brown from southernwood and so on—and produced dyes for their tartans as brilliant as any made by the professional dyers.<sup>159</sup> But by the second half of the century people who were conveniently situated would send their woollen cloth to one of the new dye-works to be dipped. And by about 1780 there was yet another service available for people in industrial regions: calico-printers were ready to take cloth from private families and print it according to any of the patterns shown in their books.<sup>160</sup>

The finished cloth had still to be made up into clothes, bedspreads, curtains and other articles. In the houses of country gentlemen many of them were made at home; but, considering the quantity of other work there was to do, it is not surprising that the local tailor was sometimes called upon to help.<sup>161</sup>

On top of all these duties there were the beds to make,

which meant more than the daily routine of turning mattresses and shaking pillows. Feather beds and pillows were the most trouble. The housewife had often to begin at the very beginning and go out in search of the feathers. Then she had to clean them and dry them before cramming them into the bed-tick or bolster-case (for which she had probably spun the flax herself). When the feathers were from sea-birds it was hard work to remove the odour from them, and Boswell attributed a sleepless night which he passed at Slains Castle partly to the noise of the sea but mainly to the disagreeable smell of his pillows, stuffed with feathers from the seashore.<sup>162</sup>

By the time the housewife had superintended the daily cooking (or done it herself) and, where necessary, had laid in a supply of provisions for the winter, she had little opportunity either to go out and enjoy herself or to stay at home and write letters. In any case, before she could begin to write she might have to make the ink. Lady Grisell Baillie had hers made at home. It consisted of "capris and gass"<sup>163</sup>—which, being interpreted, means copperas and galls. People who were less economical bought ink powder, or ink ready-made at 11½d. sterling a chopin.<sup>164</sup>

What with one thing and another, the housewife had a full life, even without complications of illness or unexpected guests. But better times were in store. They had begun to arrive, in Edinburgh, by 1785. "The women, especially the younger ones," said an observant traveller, in some disapproval, "are not so attentive to domestic matters, as their grand-mothers, and much given to strolling in the streets."<sup>165</sup>

## Chapter VII

### Servants and Retainers

If the employment agency which John Lawson set up in Edinburgh in 1701 had fulfilled its objects, Scotland would have had no servant problem. Lawson's Intelligence Office, as he called it, had the most useful function of "recording the names of servants, upon trial and certificate of their manners and qualifications, whereby masters may be provided with honest servants of all sorts, and servants may readily know what masters are unprovided". He offered to supply households in all parts of the country with reliable servants of all kinds, "such as master-households, gentlemen, valets, stewards, pages, grieves, gardeners, cooks, porters, coachmen, grooms, footmen, postilions, young cooks for waiting on gentlemen, or for change-houses; likewise gentlewomen for attending ladies, housekeepers, chamber-maids, women-stewards and cooks, women for keeping children, ordinary servants for all sorts of work in private families, also taverners and ticket-runners, with all sorts of nurses who either come to gentlemen's houses, or nurse children in their own".<sup>1</sup>

The registry office might have made it easier to find maids, but how long they were prepared to stay was another matter. Lady Grisell Baillie, for one, found it just as difficult to keep her staff after 1701 as she did before:<sup>2</sup> thirty of the sixty servants she employed between 1695 and 1704 left in less than a year, and only about a dozen stayed with her for more than two. But things were as bad, or worse, in London. There, in 1715, she engaged eight cooks. One of them stayed for a day, and another left after a single

night. A third did look like settling down, but unfortunately, after two months, the constables came and carried her off, and her ladyship's search for help began all over again.

Lady Grisell was intent on having her house run on proper, business-like lines, and possibly her maids found her rule somewhat irksome, and preferred to go elsewhere. But the servant shortage was general, and did not lessen as time went on. "Ordinary servants for all sorts of work in private families" seem to have been as much sought after as at the present day. Nobody was more aggrieved on the subject than Simon, Lord Lovat, who wrote to his Edinburgh agent in 1740 rating him for not having found the servants he wanted. "I am plagued every day of my life for want of them", he complained. What specially worried him was that, out of all the twenty servants in the house, there was only one who could shave him, and that particular one had recently married a fine lady and become absolutely useless. "There is no man in Scotland", he lamented, "that suffers so much by bad servants as I do."<sup>3</sup>

Friends were sometimes called upon to help in the search,<sup>4</sup> and in 1734 the Duchess of Atholl wrote to the Duke, then in London, asking him to find her a housemaid, who must be "very honest, & cleanly, & quiet spirited". (She had had trouble with her present one, and had recently given her "a hearty blow on her ear".<sup>5</sup>) The recognised centres for recruiting servants were the Whitsuntide and Martinmas fairs. Footmen, farm labourers, serving-lasses and all other classes of household employees attended, ready to hire themselves out for six months' or a year's service. Some of them, contented with their lot, stayed for longer: it was not unknown for a maid to stay in one situation for the rest of her life, and even to drop her own surname and go by the name of her employer.<sup>6</sup> (Katharine Mackenzie, who died at Foulis Castle in 1758, was said to be in her 118th year, and to have been a servant there for a hundred and three years!<sup>7</sup>) But not every household settled down so calmly. The justices of the peace of Lanarkshire, in fact, were so worried in 1707 at the way in which masters and

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servants gave no notice of their intention to dismiss or to leave "untill the term of flitting be come" that they ordered forty days' notice to be given on either side; even marriage did not set the servant free, unless he or she provided a substitute.<sup>8</sup> And the Dumfriesshire justices, some years later, made the quite unreasonable ruling that, even when a servant had made an actual contract for one year's service, he was not to leave at the end of that time unless he had given notice at least three months before in the presence of two witnesses, otherwise he had to stay for another year.<sup>9</sup> The whole system of engaging servants by fixed terms was bad, according to Elizabeth Hamilton; knowing that they could not be dismissed at short notice, except for some legal offence, they had no incentive to good conduct.<sup>10</sup>

The various orders made by the justices, in Scotland as in England, show clearly which social problems were defying solution. Young men and women in the Lowlands, it seems, simply did not want to go into service. If their parents managed to persuade them to do so they apparently demanded exorbitant wages (although by modern standards they seem low enough) and left as soon as they felt inclined. The Lanarkshire justices accordingly took matters into their own hands, in 1708 and again in 1716, ordering that any man, woman, boy or girl who was "eable and cappable of service", and unmarried, should be compelled to go into service, on pain of imprisonment.<sup>11</sup>

The shortage of domestic help was no temporary difficulty. The Dumfries justices half a century later were still worried at the "great penury of good servants", and went so far as to order that nobody who had been a servant should take up other work without a licence from two justices. What was more, if anybody wanting domestic help knew of a suitable man or woman for the job who happened to be disengaged, all that was necessary was to go to a justice of the peace and put in a claim. What was to happen when two would-be mistresses turned up simultaneously to demand the same maid was apparently left to the justice to decide.

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The high-handed methods of the justices obviously did nothing to make domestic service more attractive; and as, after 1750, one new industry after another created an entirely new demand for labour, fewer Lowlanders than ever were willing to spend their lives in household drudgery. People in Edinburgh and elsewhere came to depend more and more on Highland servants,<sup>12</sup> who, it seems, were not so keen on factory life; but they, unfortunately, had a tendency to the itch and an inconvenient liking for whisky.<sup>13</sup> They were decidedly rough, too, in their manners. Still, as one of the more kindly critics pointed out, that was easy to explain: they had come from poor country homes, unlike the trim English maids, many of whom had been brought up in charity schools where they had been taught to behave as good servants should.<sup>14</sup>

Travellers from England certainly found Highland servants uncouth compared with the well-trained southerners. Elizabeth Grant described her father's house at Rothiemurchus as "as full of servants as an Indian or an Irish one, strange, ignorant creatures, running about in each other's way, wondering at the fine English maids who could make so little of them". Among the rest, she said, was a piper, who, for fear of spoiling his delicate touch, "declined any work unconnected with whisky".<sup>15</sup>

As late as 1773 Dr. Johnson, touring the Hebrides, noted that some of the chief families still employed a piper.<sup>16</sup> In earlier years the piper had been regarded as one of the most important of the Highland retainers. Just as in Germany gentlemen looked out for any of their servants who could play the flute or violin, or the French horn, to play to them while at table,<sup>17</sup> so in Scotland the piper played at meals and entertained guests in the evening. In the morning, while the chief was dressing, the piper would play outside his window.<sup>18</sup> There was a special training college for pipers in the Isle of Skye. Lord Lovat sent his men there, and in an indenture between David Fraser and himself, in 1743, it was agreed that his lordship should send Fraser to the isle "in order to have him perfected a Highland Pyper



by the famous Malcolm M'Grimon". In return Fraser undertook to serve Lord Lovat or his successor for seven years "by night and by day"; and Lovat bound himself to provide for him bed, board, clothes and washing and to pay him fifty marks Scots a year for the seven years.<sup>19</sup> Two years later the arrangement was evidently working well: his lordship wrote of David as "a very modest, pretty young fellow".<sup>20</sup> Part of Fraser's duty was to join a fellow-piper in playing round the table at a dinner-party and afterwards to pipe the guests out of sight on their way home.

Besides the piper and the piper's gillie (who carried the bagpipes) there were several other retainers attached to a Highland household. We remember how Evan Dhu boasted of the magnificent sight presented by his Chief "with his tail on"—the "tail" being the usual followers when the Chief went visiting. "'There is', he continued, stopping and drawing himself proudly up, while he counted upon his fingers the several officers of his chief's retinue; 'there is his *hanchman*, or right-hand man; then his *bàrd*, or poet; then his *bladier*, or orator, to make harangues to the great folks whom he visits; then his *gilly-more*, or armour-bearer, to carry his sword, and target, and his gun; then his *gilly-casfiuch*, who carries him on his back through the sikes and brooks; then his *gilly-comstrian*, to lead his horse by the bridle in steep and difficult paths; then his *gilly-trushharnish*, to carry his knapsack; and the piper and the piper's man, and it may be a dozen young lads beside, that have no business, but are just boys of the belt, to follow the laird, and do his honour's bidding.' 'And does your Chief regularly maintain all these men?' demanded Waverley. 'All these?' replied Evan; 'ay, and many a fair head beside, that would not ken where to lay itself, but for the mickle barn at Glen-naquoich.'"<sup>21</sup> As time went on the retinue became smaller and smaller, but the custom of keeping bards to recite the genealogies of their chiefs had not wholly died out in the last quarter of the century.<sup>22</sup>

The ordinary household servants usually included both

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men and women. The establishments of Sir John Foulis and Lady Grisell Baillie may be taken as typical for people of fairly high rank. Sir John, at the beginning of the century, maintained a chaplain, four menservants and four women, besides outdoor staff. Lady Grisell's staff list in 1740 comprised housekeeper, "gentlewoman", laundry-maid, housemaid, cook, washer, dairymaid, kitchen-maid, butler, gardener, coachman, footman, under-coachman, postilion, groom, carter, under-cook, "herd without meat" and "officer without meat".

The servant shortage was considerably eased for those landlords whose rents were paid partly in direct service. Tenants could be called upon, according to the terms of their agreements, to help in fetching and carrying, spinning, digging, and various other jobs in and outside the house. Sir Hugh Campbell, in the north, took advantage of the privilege when, in 1709, he wrote to a tenant of Arderseir saying that he had acquired some more land and was anxious to get it ploughed; all his neighbours had given him a day's work with every plough they had, and, he added: "upon Thursday I expect you will not fail betimes in the morning to send up your own two ploughs and that every man who has a plough going in Arderseir may do the like".<sup>23</sup> That was all very well, provided that the summons did not interfere with the tenant's private plans; otherwise one would expect grudging service, especially where, as on the isle of Lismore, some tenants had to journey eight or nine miles to the mainland on at least six days in the year to fulfil their obligations.<sup>24</sup> In the parish of Kingussie and Inch, Inverness, where the system still survived at the end of the century, personal services were so often demanded that the tenant was liable to be more at the disposal of his landlord than the feudal vassal had ever been.<sup>25</sup> A somewhat similar system prevailed in Norway, where the nobility could summon their tenants to work at any time on their own land; but there the tenants were paid for their work, and (what was not always the case in Scotland) the instruction which they received from the head gardener

made them better husbandmen and gardeners on their own little farms.<sup>26</sup>

Considering all things, it is surprising that some of the great households managed to keep up such style as they did. When, for example, Sir James Grant entertained fifty people to dinner in the great hall of Castle Grant, as was his custom during the shooting season, the fare was excellent; and perhaps only the very frequent guests suspected that the footmen behind every chair, resplendent in green and scarlet livery, were not exactly what they seemed. They were nothing but untrained lads, sons of small tenants, brought in specially for the occasion.<sup>27</sup> If they committed a few *faux pas* they could hardly be blamed. But perhaps Sir James took the same precaution as the Norfolk diarist, the Rev. James Woodforde: he, to be on the safe side, self-sacrificingly ate two dinners on the same day, one of them by himself, to teach his new boy to wait at table.<sup>28</sup>

Some employers did take steps to have their servants well trained, and one enthusiast wanted all kitchen-hands to be given cookery-books. Some people, he complained, promoted their scullery boys and girls to be cooks without any training at all. They did it partly out of good nature and partly because they got them for low wages. What employers ought to do, he said, was to train their servants well and then pay them enough to induce them to stay.<sup>29</sup>

That was in 1750. If he had wanted to add force to his arguments he might well have quoted a letter which the Earl of Sutherland had written to his daughter-in-law between thirty and forty years before. The Earl spoke of the great grief it was to him to see the "nestie pickle" in the house of Dunrobin "by keeping servants that minded nothing, and knows not what belongs to cleanliness, so that your best furniture goes to nought". "I wold have you keep none but good dilligent servants," he admonished her, "lett ther fee be what it pleases."<sup>30</sup> But in some districts employers were not allowed to pay high wages even if they wanted to. To quote the Lanarkshire justices again, in 1708 they fixed *maximum* wages of £24 Scots

(£2 sterling) a year for any domestic manservant able to perform "all manner of work relating to husbandry", and £16 Scots to younger men (or £8 to lads who had their food in the house). "A strong and sufficient woman servant for barns, byres, shearing, brewing, bakeing, washing and other necessary work within and without the house" was entitled to £14 Scots and no more, and "a lass or young maide" £8 (or 13s. 4d. sterling—a year!) The same rates were confirmed in 1716.<sup>31</sup> And in spite of the "great penury of good servants" which had developed by 1751, male servants in Dumfries were still to have no more than £2:10s. sterling a year, or £2:5s. and two pairs of shoes; and the invaluable "strong, sufficient servant woman" was to manage on 30s. sterling, or 25s. and two pairs of shoes. What seems particularly harsh, employers could be fined if they offered a servant a shirt or an apron "or any other additional bounty whatsoever".<sup>32</sup>

Even allowing for the comparatively low prices of food and clothes in those times, the statutory wages seem very small; but they were roughly the same as Sir John Foulis paid at Woodhall and Lady Grisell Baillie at Mellerstain. Edinburgh wages were naturally rather higher. In 1700 Lady Grisell was paying one of her male servants there £36 Scots (£3 sterling) a year and providing all his clothes except "linens". One of her maids received £48 Scots and another, who came in 1704 "to wate on the childrin", was paid £66:13:4.<sup>33</sup> But by 1714, even at Mellerstain, her ladyship found that it sometimes paid to offer more: at Whitsun she appointed a butler at £2 sterling a year; but by Martinmas she was engaging another, also at £2, but with the proviso, "if he pleases me it is to be £3".

In London Lady Grisell found that she had to pay almost twice as much for servants as she did in Scotland. The rise of a wealthy merchant class in England had already caused a greatly increased demand; and by 1725 Defoe could write, with some truth: "Women servants are now so scarce that from 30s. and 40s. a year their wages are of late increased to six, seven, nay £8 per annum and upwards . . . our

servant wenches are so puffed up with pride nowadays that they never think they go fine enough: it is a hard matter to know the mistress from the maid by their dress; nay very often the maid shall be much the finer of the two".<sup>34</sup> Similar complaints were to be made in Scotland, but not yet.

During the first half of the century, wage-rates were fairly level throughout Scotland. In the north, for instance, Sir Robert Gordon and Sir Archibald Grant paid very nearly the same amounts as were fixed for Lanarkshire.<sup>35</sup> But after about 1760 the variations between one district and another were considerable. Prosperity was growing, but not at the same rate in all parts of the country; and communications were not yet good enough to encourage servants to move freely to better-paid posts, and so indirectly to restore something of the old wage-equality. In consequence, a family which, in the 'seventies, divided its time between the Leith district and the Isle of Skye had to pay £6 a year for a housekeeper in the one place as compared with only £2:10s. in the other, and £2:10s. for a maid as against 12s. (still for a whole year). The same family in Edinburgh had to pay a charwoman 2s. 6d. *a day*.<sup>36</sup> Board-wages of maids in Edinburgh and Glasgow were then about £4 a year.<sup>37</sup> In Dunfermline they were still only £2.<sup>38</sup>

Whatever the local variations, between 1750 and 1790 wages in all parts of the country approximately doubled. Ordinary maids in quite small villages came to draw £3 or £4 a year, men servants £7 or £8 or more; while in Monimail, Fife, "upper family servants" rose from about £8 a year to between £20 and £25, and livery servants from £4 to £10 or £12.<sup>39</sup> Higher wages brought other benefits in their train. For example, maidservants in one Angus parish who used to earn 15s. a year with bounties consisting of two ells of linen, two aprons and two shirts, came to receive £2:5s. and the same bounties as before, and in addition two whole weeks' holiday in the year, with two pecks of meal each to maintain them during their time off.<sup>40</sup>

The parish ministers who contributed to the *Statistical*

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*Account of Scotland* drawn up in the 'nineties disapproved of many things, but of none more than the growing prosperity and independence of domestic servants. Here is a typical diatribe, referring to the parish of Kilspindie, Perthshire: "Servants' wages in this country have risen to a most alarming height. The men from £7 to £15.15 a-year, with 2 pecks of meal a-week, and 9d. a-week for milk or beer; women from £2 to £3, with their victuals. The men-servants, with all their enormous fees, are disobliging, perverse and obstinate, refusing to work more than 6 hours in the forenoon, and 4 in the afternoon. They have no idea of submitting to any little oeconomical employment at a winter fire-side. Bid them mend a corn-sack, and they will fly in your face." <sup>41</sup> Families with plenty of children of their own, and less need to hire servants, counted themselves lucky; and some of the rest, resolved to suffer no more from "the sauciness of single servants", decided to employ cottagers, whose family ties made them more dependant and humble.<sup>42</sup>

Working hours certainly did improve as wages increased. Sir John Sinclair, on his visit to Russia, might well feel for the domestic servants there, compelled to long and tedious hours of duty,<sup>43</sup> but it was not so long ago that Scottish servants too had been expected to be on duty throughout the livelong day. Gardeners, after a heavy day's work out of doors, had had to spend their evenings making beehives and mole-traps and other useful things.<sup>44</sup> Female servants, no matter what their other duties, had been expected to settle down to their spinning as soon as they were free, and, at least in Lady Grisell Baillie's household, to keep at it until nine o'clock at night.<sup>45</sup> Their other duties might be exacting enough. Maidservants in Midlothian farmhouses, as late as 1765, had to act as "scodgie", or drudge, for a week at a time, cooking, making the beds, keeping the fire in order, bringing in the water, and doing all the rest of the work of running the house.<sup>46</sup> And in the Highlands, in particular, women's work had regularly included heavy out-door labour in addition to dairying, washing and the

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other more obviously feminine tasks.<sup>47</sup> No wonder that an English traveller thought them "the greatest slaves and drudges in the world"!<sup>48</sup> But as times became more prosperous servants began to assert themselves, and to demand free time for themselves. Already in the 'seventies the maidservants of Paisley, for instance, stipulated when they were appointed that they should have three hours off duty every Thursday evening, from five until eight. The minute they were free they hurried to a house where fiddlers and partners were waiting for them and danced away merrily until eight; then, "with cheerfulness and alacrity", they returned to work. "This practice", says our informant, approvingly, "promotes matrimony." It evidently did: men in those parts usually married at twenty and the girls at seventeen.<sup>49</sup>

The individual servant was in many cases not so much better off after his wage increases as might have been expected. Up to about 1750 the lowness of the wages was partly offset by generous tipping. Servants not only received "vails", as they were called, from their masters on New Year's Day, but also from every guest who stayed in the house. A few thinking people did feel a little awkward at allowing their visitors to pay for their own entertainment, which was what really happened, but it took a stage farce—*High Life below Stairs*—to show up the whole system. When it was produced in an Edinburgh theatre it caused such an uproar that the building had to be cleared: the footmen in the gallery created a pandemonium and their masters had to overpower them and throw them out. The performance brought the whole question to the fore. The gentlemen of Aberdeen were the first to tackle it: they resolved to raise their servants' wages and thereafter to forbid them to accept drink-money, card-money or any other form of tips from visitors. Edinburgh employers followed their lead; and before long the Faculty of Advocates and other public bodies did the same, and tipping became a thing of the past<sup>50</sup> (much to the satisfaction of a writer to the *Scots Magazine* who maintained that farm

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labourers were far more deserving of good wages than were indoor servants, who lived in ease and affluence<sup>51</sup>). It seemed incredible to an Edinburgh writer, some years later, that the practice was still allowed to go on in England.<sup>52</sup>

In spite of wage increases the ordinary servant had little to save, but the retainer who had given good service was usually provided by his employer with at least a bare subsistence for his old age, if it were only a yearly allowance of three or four bolls of meal.<sup>53</sup> The old family nurse, in particular, was looked upon almost as a relation, and many a country household had its women's house, as it was called, where she and other elderly female servants could live in comfort.<sup>54</sup> The Haddington family went still further and built a small village in East Lothian called the Widow's Row, and fourteen families of old employees lived there rent-free and enjoyed an annual allowance as well.<sup>55</sup> Not every employer could afford to be so generous. Apparently, too, not every household servant wanted to give up work entirely when he was too old for housework—sometimes he preferred to take up teaching! So, in the 'eighties, in the Isle of Mull, "The masters of the free schools . . . being generally old domestic servants, are not sufficiently qualified for the charge committed to them",<sup>56</sup> which is in no way surprising.

The living conditions of most servants were nowhere near so comfortable as those of some of the pensioners. There was one master, it is true, who provided his staff with ideal quarters: John Hamilton, of Bargeny House, eighteen miles from Ayr, invited his servants to bring their families, and gave each of them a house about a quarter of a mile away from his own, at a very low rent. The houses had gardens, and altogether the village formed a pleasant little community.<sup>57</sup> But that was a quite unusual state of affairs. The ex-footman who described the settlement evidently knew of no similar arrangement elsewhere. And for a complete contrast we have only to read of his own experiences as a young stable-hand, when the only place for him to sleep was the large tub in which the coachmen mixed



the oats and corn for the horses.<sup>58</sup> In ordinary small houses the maid usually slept in the kitchen, either in a bed or simply curled up on the floor or under the dresser. Large houses had their servants' quarters, but the inventories of the furniture in them make depressing reading: chests of drawers "much spoil'd and broken", ash chairs without bottoms, chaff beds and the like.<sup>59</sup> Admittedly, the family bedrooms sometimes looked little better.

Where the whole house was crowded and ill-furnished the servants could hardly complain if their own rooms were cramped and ugly. Food was a different matter. Mary Wollstonecraft might write in disgust of the Scandinavian habit of giving servants different food from their masters—"a remnant of barbarism"<sup>60</sup>—but Scottish families did the same. "The servants eat ill", recalled Elizabeth Mure, writing of the early part of the century, "having a sett form for the week, of three days broth and salt meat, the rest megare, with plenty of bread and small bear."<sup>61</sup> Lady Grisell Baillie certainly allowed plenty of bread and beer: half an oatmeal loaf each for breakfast and supper, with a mutchkin (an English pint) of beer, or milk when there was any, and another mutchkin of beer at dinner. Her servants' dinners were dull but wholesome, except for a complete absence of vegetables: "Sunday they have boild beef and broth made in the great pot, and always the broth made to serve two days. Monday broth made on Sunday and a Herring. Teusday [*sic*] broth and Beef. Wednesday broth and 2 eggs each. Thursday Broth and beef. Fryday Broth and Herring. Saturday broth without meat, and cheese, or a puden or blood pudens, or a hagish, or what is most convenient."<sup>62</sup> The servants' fare in other great houses was similar. As late as 1829 Lady Breadalbane ordered that no butter should be served in the servants' hall, but that the servants' pies and puddings should be made with dripping; that there should be no hot joints for the stewards' luncheon; and that the butler himself should remove the sugar and sweetmeats from the dining-room and take them straight to the housekeeper, *never* to the pantry where

unauthorised people might help themselves.<sup>63</sup> However, in some districts the servants' meals could be varied with such luxuries as "cold gooss pye" <sup>64</sup> or salmon—salmon, sometimes, until they were weary of it.

The ordinary small household was a different matter. Where the master and mistress of the house could afford meat only on Sundays they and their servants lived for the rest of the week mostly on porridge, kail (broth) and bannocks. The meat from Sunday was put in Monday's kail, to give it a better flavour. But one farmer, in Perth, repeated the process a little too often, and the flavour became rather too pronounced; and when his servants could stand no more of it, and protested, they proved in court that the kail was seven years old.<sup>65</sup>

In the western Highlands and islands the servants often had nothing at all to eat until eleven o'clock. In a typical Hebridean household, towards the end of the century, they had two meals a day, consisting of thick water porridge and barley bannocks. The indoor servants never sat down to dinner, but stood round the table and ate out of one dish. The outdoor staff had a tubful of porridge, mixed with chopped greens, carried out to them at midday, and they drank it with gusto and gurgling noises out of wooden noggins which they handed from one to another, finishing off with a few bannocks.<sup>66</sup> On Christmas Day they had a glass of whisky. But the maidservants of Stornoway had one every morning, and if the mistress forgot to offer it to them "discontent and idleness throughout the day, on the part of the maid or maids, would be the sure consequence".<sup>67</sup>

In some houses the servants had good cause for discontent—Simon, Lord Lovat's staff at Castle Dunie in particular. They had little if any wages: their reward was to be recommended to better service later on. In the meantime they were allowed no food at all besides what they carried off from the table. Consequently, if a guest put down his knife for a moment his plate was whisked away before he could collect his wits.<sup>68</sup> Lovat was notoriously as unscrupulous as an employer as he was in other respects,

and there is no reason to suspect that servants elsewhere went equally hungry. But their food did lack variety. It is easy to understand the sudden impulse which got a young Belgian manservant into trouble while he was working for a family in the Hebrides. His fare seemed to him very, very dull, and when at Christmas he had to hand round the plum pudding, temptation was too much for him. "On my removing the brown earthen vessel containing the spare pudding, on the first day in question," he recalled in after years (without any contrition), "contrary to my usual custom of setting it down on the sideboard, I walked out of the room and down stairs with it. My young master, who had his eye upon me, took the alarm, and followed. To make the best use of my time, I had, ere I got to the kitchen, filled my mouth with the pudding. On his overtaking me, he made no scruple, but asked me directly if I thought nobody was to have any pudding but myself? I was in no condition to reply, but there was no remedy; and, with my mouth full, I gobbled out in return, 'and what sort of a share should I have got, had I waited for your asking?' Several of the young ladies, who had more feeling for me, laughed secretly, but heartily, at my exploit; and the day following, on the pudding being ready for removal, my young mistress gave me a signal, at which I quietly removed the dish, fixing it in full view upon the sideboard, but, in so doing, I contrived adroitly to remove its contents into my hands, and demurely walking out of the room, I enjoyed myself at my leisure." <sup>69</sup>

A man capable of such effrontery was almost sure to get on, and before long he became a servant to the Duke of Gordon. Dinner at Gordon Castle was quite to his liking: he sat at the housekeeper's left hand, and after the meal, when the women had retired, he remained to drink wine with the rest of the menservants, in great style.<sup>70</sup> He was proud of himself in those days, and very pleased with his new suit, of which the front part of the waistcoat alone cost him six guineas, and the rest in proportion.<sup>71</sup>

At that time (in the 'seventies) such extravagance on

the part of the better-paid servants was not unusual. The tobacco lords of Glasgow owed not a little of their prestige to their powdered flunkies, resplendent in plush breeches, white stockings, enormous shoe buckles and brass buttons, and hats with gold bands.<sup>72</sup> Edinburgh maidservants, who had formerly dressed in simple blue or red cloaks or plaids, now walked abroad in silk cloaks and caps, ribbons, ruffles, flounced petticoats and false hair. It cost them more than a year's wages, so it was said, to rig themselves out for one Sunday or holiday.<sup>73</sup> As a Prussian traveller remarked about English maids, the poorest of them were careful to be in the fashion; there was not the same distinction between the dress of the upper and lower classes as there was, for instance, in Germany.<sup>74</sup> So ministers all over Scotland sighed over the growing neglect of "the grave and solid productions of the country" for the gay cloths, silks, muslins and printed cottons of England,<sup>75</sup> complaining that "fifty years ago, silk and cotton were very rarely to be seen; now, a servant-maid cannot be in dress without both. There were then no watches but the minister's; now there is scarcely a man servant who is without one."<sup>76</sup> But those who so disliked progress could take heart: women servants in the Highlands still went bare-foot,<sup>77</sup> and even the Edinburgh maids still objected to wearing shoes and stockings in the morning,<sup>78</sup> which rather suggests that, when they did wear them, they would walk as awkwardly as the ones Edward Burt had likened to "a cat shod with walnut-shells".<sup>79</sup> (Times changed rapidly: by 1829 Lady Breadalbane had to make an entirely new rule—that her maids should not wear nails in their shoes!<sup>80</sup>)

All of this was before Mrs. Beeton and her great work on household management, but more than one mistress forestalled her in writing precepts for servants. First and foremost was Lady Grisell Baillie. "You must rise airy in the morning", she admonished her butler, "which will make your whole business and household accounts easie. . . . Consider your business and have a little forethought that you may never be in a hurry or have anything to seek, to

which nothing will contribut more than having a fixt and regular places for seting every thing in your custody in order. . . . Always take care to keep your doors and your cuberts lockt where you have any charge." And so she went on, with full and detailed instructions to him and to the housekeeper to keep the men and maids close at their work from morning till night.<sup>81</sup> Her régime was too strict: most of her servants departed post-haste. Perhaps they would have preferred the more downright methods of Mrs. Cluness of Sutherland, who, many years later, was said to rule her servants "with a prudence and sagacity beyond all praise", but who at times completely lost her temper and kicked off a slipper to fling at an offending maid.<sup>82</sup>

Adam Petrie, in his *Rules of Good Deportment* (1720), included a number of precepts for servants, warning them not to cough or sneeze at table, not to appear with dirty hands or "clownish" dress, not to lean upon the back of their master's chair, and so on. Dean Swift, too, wrote a series of "Directions to Servants". To the butler he recommended, among other practical suggestions, "When you clean your plate, leave the whiting plainly to be seen in all the chinks, for fear your lady should not believe you had cleaned it". To the cook: "When you find that you cannot get dinner ready at the time appointed, put the clock back, and then it may be ready to a minute"; and "To save time and trouble, cut your apples and onions with the same knife; and well-bred gentry love the taste of an onion in everything they eat". And to the footman: "When you wait behind a chair at meals, keep constantly wriggling the back of the chair that the person behind whom you stand may know you are ready to attend him".<sup>83</sup> Page after page he wrote of these ironical hints. They were based on his observations in other parts of the kingdom, but they might have been drawn from a Scottish household—that of the Rev. John Mill of Shetland, for instance, the bane of whose life consisted of "cross-grained naughty servants, being thievish and mischievous, and liker wild beasts than Christians".<sup>84</sup>

In one case the naughtiness showed itself quite early. John MacDonald, a servant for many years, gave signs of an independent spirit while still a child. He was very young when first employed to mind a baby. "I did not like the confinement of this", he recalled. "I pinched the child in the cradle and made it cry. I was turned off accordingly, which was the thing that I wanted." His next job was in a gentleman's house, turning the spit. There he was given veal for dinner, which he loathed; so he put it behind a chest and set off.<sup>85</sup> Life as a postilion evidently pleased him better; it gave him more variety. Moreover, he had an understanding employer who allowed him to keep foxes, hares, ravens, otters, magpies and eagles, and he somehow managed to beguile the cooks into giving him raw meat for them.<sup>86</sup>

MacDonald's restless nature showed throughout his career, but he was innocent of the usual vices of his kind. Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk might threaten to sack any servant guilty of drinking, quarrelling, swearing, lying or stealing,<sup>87</sup> but from all accounts there were few others to be had. Employers had to be wise to all their tricks. Thus the reason that housewives in Skye had their oatcakes made of "graddaned" meal (meal separated from the husks and toasted instead of being threshed and dried in a kiln) was said to be that the local servants were a faithless pack who stole anything they could: every time corn passed through their hands they pilfered some. Hence graddaning, which cut down the work to a single process, was reckoned to save a good deal.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, employers very likely exaggerated the sins of their servants. Perhaps a gardener here and there, as much a law to himself as any Andrew Fairservice, did rob his master of a few vegetables. Perhaps some of the maids were "slovenly, slothful, and unconscionable cheats", as Smollett alleged all French ones to be.<sup>89</sup> Towards the end of the century, it is true, their new prosperity did rather turn their heads, so that a minister could write of them, in sarcasm: "Nice in the choice of their food to squeamishness,

it must neither fall short, nor exceed that exact proportion of cookery, which their appetites can relish. Care too must be taken, that no offence shall be offered them. They must sleep in the morning as long, and go to bed at night as soon, as their pleasure dictates.”<sup>90</sup> But the main faults of Scottish servants (those of them who stayed) seem to have been obstinacy and an undue familiarity with their employers.

Various educational writers, bent upon instilling into young people a proper, humane attitude towards servants, at the same time stressed the need of a certain reserve in dealing with them. According to Dr. John Gregory, “if you make them your confidants, you spoil them, and debase yourselves”.<sup>91</sup> We should show the children, said Elizabeth Hamilton, that we consider servants “as useful assistants in the business of our family, but not in the light of companions”.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, familiarity was an undeniable privilege of long service. At times it became embarrassing, as when an old man serving at a dinner-party, tired of the many requests made to him, snapped impatiently, “Cry a’ thegither, that’s the way to be served”; or when another servant, in a loud whisper to the hostess, advised her to “press the jeelies; they winna keep”! One servant became so trying that his mistress lost patience and told him to leave; but he promptly and emphatically replied, “Na, na, my lady; I druve ye to your marriage, and I shall stay to drive ye to your burial”.<sup>93</sup> Faced with such devotion as that, what could a mistress do?

## Chapter VIII

### Clothes

When the occasion called for it, the Scottish laird and his family could dress as stylishly as anybody south of the Border. Weddings and christenings and formal dinner-parties brought out really elegant dresses and suits, either in shimmering silks or in rich and colourful satins. At one Highland party, indeed, an English guest said enthusiastically that he had seen nothing to surpass the ladies' gowns even at the court of St. James's itself.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, he went on to make a very tactless remark—that each lady dressed in a style of her own. Eighteenth-century ladies would certainly not feel flattered that each and all had failed to conform with fashion.

Actually, on formal occasions, Scottish ladies followed English fashions quite closely, even in the Highlands. Some of the Highland lairds, too, preferred to dress in the English style (as most of the Lowland gentlemen chose to do), and from 1747 onwards they were in any case prohibited by law from wearing their traditional costume.

At the beginning of the century dress was distinctly gaudy.<sup>2</sup> Men and women wore clothes of brocade and other heavy materials in orange, yellow or some other vivid shade. Nothing could be too sumptuous for them, and the more tinsel and gold or silver lace they could introduce into their costumes the better pleased they were. But by about 1760 tastes had become quieter. Ladies were then choosing more delicate shades and lighter fabrics, such as lustrings and shot silks trimmed with gauze or lace; and gentlemen, rather tired of heavy gold ornamentation on their coats,



came to prefer borders of flowers embroidered in their natural colours.

Colour apart, styles changed rather slowly. Until about 1735 men still went on wearing the seventeenth-century type of coat with its long, buttoned skirt. The first alteration was in the cuffs, which gradually became bigger until, by 1750, they covered the elbows and had up to six buttons on each. The tailor had to save his material somewhere, so the next change was to tighten the skirts and the sleeves and to cut down the old-style long waistcoat to its present length; but as the result was rather too sedate for eighteenth-century tastes he added the necessary touch of frivolity in the shape of enormous buttons, sometimes of gold or silver, but more often of steel or glass. Breeches seem to have escaped the worst extravagances of style. They buttoned at the waist (this was before the days of braces) and had a pocket at each side, and the correct thing was to dangle a gold fob from one of them, with a watch or seals. The well-dressed gentleman also wore a fine linen shirt and a lawn tie inset with lace, or, later in the century, a white linen stock. For important functions he wore white stockings; otherwise he rather favoured clocked ones, especially in red or yellow. With them he wore square or round-toed shoes, according to the current fashion. They were decked at first with little buckles, then, in the extravagant 'seventies, with such large ones that they almost covered the instep.

So far, unless his shoes pinched, our gentleman was fairly comfortably dressed. The bane of his life was his wig. Fashion unaccountably decreed that men should continue to shave off their own hair and wear somebody else's. The result may have been very handsome, but the wig was hot and cumbrous, and the ordinary man lost no time in taking it off as soon as he had the chance. He was then able to relax, with a loose-fitting cap to hide his baldness; and that was how his intimate friends usually found him.

Out of doors most gentlemen wore a beaver hat. Until about 1750 it was very small, and usually three-cornered. Then, as coats became narrower, hats became broader,

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and within a few years they were enormous. Next, in the 'seventies, a rather foolish-looking little round hat came into fashion, but fortunately it soon gave place to one with a larger brim.

To complete the picture the man of fashion either wore a sword or carried a cane. The change took place somewhere about 1730.

If gentlemen's frills and furbelows took a long time to arrange, their womenfolk must have spent still longer before their pier-glasses. There was nothing of the "slip-on" variety about their dresses. In the first half of the century they usually wore a laced bodice and an elaborate skirt, often trimmed with lace. The lacing was either hidden by a stomacher or treated as a decoration in itself. An alternative form of dress introduced in the reign of George II was the *sacque*, a pleated gown falling in graceful folds from the shoulders and worn with a full, flounced skirt. This particular style persisted well into the second half of the century; but from that time changes of fashion were more frequent.

The most exciting fashion-change must undoubtedly have been the introduction of the hoop, the foundation of a very picturesque costume. The first one appeared in the reign of George I as a modest little affair. The early ones were all moderate in size, but after the first novelty had worn off ladies began to vie with one another in the amount of space they could take up. The climax was reached between 1735 and 1740, when the reigning beauties wore hoops up to nine yards in circumference. That was a world record: France itself could not compete with it.

Stories are told of a lady who was saved from drowning by the extreme width of her hoop, which kept her afloat. There was another case, too, in which one of these fantastically wide costumes might have been prosaically called "serviceable". A fugitive from the battle of Culloden, Robert Strange, fled to Edinburgh and dashed into the room where his lady-love sat singing at her needlework. The soldiers were hard on his heels, but the lady, completely

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self-possessed, quietly raised her hooped gown. Her lover darted underneath it and stayed there undetected while the troops ransacked the house.<sup>3</sup> Thereafter, we may be fairly certain, the young man would never complain of the amazing lengths of material which were required to keep his rescuer in fashion.

There was a practical limit to the size of the hoop if its occupant was ever to walk downstairs or even to go through a doorway. Long before that limit was reached the hoops were quite difficult enough to manage. It must have caused considerable relief when the arbiters of fashion (whoever they may have been) decided that the time had come for a change. But after taking up so much space, ladies could not allow themselves to retire all at once into slim obscurity. They retained their hoops, but on a much smaller scale; then, to compensate for the loss of width at the bottom of their gowns, they added it to their hips by means of large panniers.

The shoes which they wore until that time (about 1750) had high heels (often of red leather) and smallish buckles, similar to those on gentlemen's shoes; but the toes, instead of being square, were usually pointed, with turned-up tips. The next style was round-toed, ornamented at first with large buckles and later on with rosettes and bows. They were all mainly for out-door wear, and, to judge by their shape, their owners probably kicked them off with considerable relief on returning home. The light slippers worn in the house at least look comfortable.

At home in the morning, before having their hair dressed in the latest style, ladies wore full caps of flowered lawn or some other pretty material. On their visits to England, Scottish ladies, when they went out, perched on top of their caps the dainty straw hats fashionable in London. In Scotland, on the other hand, they dispensed with hats and wore brightly coloured plaids, lined with silk, which they brought over their heads and draped gracefully round their shoulders. According to a contemporary traveller, a large gathering of ladies so dressed looked as vivid as a flower garden.<sup>4</sup>

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The use of the plaid was apparently the only *correct* departure from the ordinary English full dress. As far north as Inverness, quite early in the century, the majority of men and women of all ranks dressed in the English style, and were admitted by an Englishman to make "a good appearance enough".<sup>5</sup> People of distinction in the western isles adopted the same fashion.<sup>6</sup> But there were exceptions, particularly among the old ladies, who liked to assert their independence. Lord Cockburn knew several who cared nothing at all for fashion, but dressed exactly as they chose. One of them, Sophia Johnston, always wore a man's hat when she went out, and normally kept it on in the house as well; and the rest of her dress consisted of a cloth gown like a man's coat, buttoned closely from the chin to the ground, worsted stockings, and strong shoes with large brass clasps.<sup>7</sup> Another, at the other extreme, was Mrs. Rothead of Inverleith, who "would sail like a ship from Tarshish, gorgeous in velvet or rustling in silk, and done up in all the accompaniments of fan, ear-rings and finger-rings, falling sleeves, scent bottle, embroidered bag, hoop and train—all superb, yet all in purest taste; and managing all this seemingly heavy rigging with as much ease as a full-blown swan does its plumage, she would take possession of the centre of a large sofa, and at the same moment, without the slightest visible exertion, would cover the whole of it with her bravery, the graceful folds seeming to lay themselves over it like summer waves".<sup>8</sup>

But independence of character was not confined to the old ladies, nor were idiosyncrasies of dress. Probably the best-known oddity of the 'forties was James, Earl of Balcarres, who was not always satisfied with the number of curls in his wig, and thought nothing of adding little bunches of his own here and there; and he so slashed his shoes for comfort that they were said to resemble boats with cabins at the ends.<sup>9</sup> The famous John Home, too, could not be bothered with niceties of fashion. When he set out from Edinburgh to London, in 1755, his entire luggage consisted of his new tragedy in one pocket of his greatcoat and a clean shirt and

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nightcap in the other <sup>10</sup>—hardly the best way to impress the influential people he went to visit.

Nevertheless, most of the gentry did wear ceremonial dress when the occasion called for it. In country districts such occasions were very rare; but, all the same, people were prepared for them when they came. Full dress cost a small fortune, but two or three outfits could be made to last a lifetime. As late as 1760, indeed, society girls had to be satisfied with just one expensive gown—except that they could sometimes wheedle their mother into lending them one of hers. The one time when economy was thrown to the winds was when one of the daughters got married; the whole family then appeared in new silks and velvets, although quite likely their gay clothes were to be stored away in coffers as soon as the festivities were over.<sup>11</sup> But a more luxurious age was on the way. Late in the century, when even the servants had begun to deck themselves in finery, ladies were not at all anxious to make the same dresses last for ever.

To judge from Lady Grisell Baillie's experience a family could dress correctly in Scotland far more cheaply than in London. Her average yearly expenditure on clothes for the family between 1693 and 1714 was £62 sterling. In the next four years, in London, she spent £346, £351, £702 (that was the year of her daughter Rachel's marriage) and £513.<sup>12</sup> But perhaps the comparison is unfair: in Scotland the family could lead fairly secluded lives, but in London they had to mix regularly in the highest society.

What is particularly noticeable in Lady Grisell's expenditure in Scotland is the amount she spent on ribbons and lace—yards and yards of them. Some were for "the bairns". Some were to sew on "shifts". And she bought piles of both for her daughter Grisie's wedding, to go with the bride's "sute cloathes trim'd with silver" and her green satin petticoat and with Rachy's "sute trim'd with silk". The bride's garters alone took four ells of ribbon, besides silver tassels; and she had two sets of "headsutes" and ruffles of fine lace.

Margaret Rose, daughter of the Laird of Kilravock, also had plenty of lace among her wedding outfit in 1701, for head-dresses and ruffles and to trim her night-clothes. The more substantial part of her trousseau was made up of  $17\frac{1}{2}$  ells of flowered silk, with  $9\frac{1}{8}$  ells of green silk to line it;  $8\frac{1}{2}$  ells of white Persian taffeta for a gown and coat, and, for lining, 4 ells of scarlet taffeta;  $3\frac{1}{4}$  ells of Indian satin for "ane under coat", and 3 ells of flannel for "an undermost coate". To wear with them she had silk stockings and laced shoes, scarlet and white ribbons for her hair, cherry and white ribbons for garters, a flowered muslin apron, white gloves, a necklace, and a silk handkerchief. In addition, to make her charms really irresistible she bought an ivory comb, two whole pounds of powder, and a shilling's worth of patches to set off her dimples.<sup>13</sup>

What kind of necklace she wore we are not told. It cost only a few shillings, and could not have compared with the beautiful jewels which some ladies received as heirlooms or as wedding presents. Sir Archibald Hope's daughter Margaret, for instance, was given some lovely gems when she got married, late in the seventeenth century: they included a ring with three large diamonds and four small ones between them, a ring set with a large emerald and three diamonds each side, a similar one with a ruby in place of the emerald, a ring set with six diamonds, and two more set with seven diamonds each, and an amethyst necklace.<sup>14</sup> And yet, such is human nature, even the proud possessors of jewels such as those would sometimes think far more of a small souvenir trinket. In the eyes of its owner a cheap ring enclosing a lock of hair might be worth more than any diamond. And the craze for souvenirs did not stop with locks of hair. Strange though it seems, when Lunardi descended from his balloon at Cupar and found the town hall full of ladies to greet him, he gave them unbounded joy by cutting a number of small shreds from the neck of the balloon and giving them one each, to be set in rings and lockets.<sup>15</sup>

But we must come back to our weddings, and the pretty

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clothes that were worn. At Major Erskine's marriage in Edinburgh, in 1725, "The most remarkable of the bride's cloaths", according to Miss Anne Stuart, "were a crimson velvet smoke petecoat, trimed with a silver or gold arras (I have forgot which), and a cherry sattin hoop. She had three sute of cloaths, viz., a white sattin, a blue podesoy trimmed with scolopt open silver lace above the knee, and a green stuff with gold flower, all very pretty." To show off all of them the festivities must have been even more prolonged than usual. But the guests would not mind—they had all the more chance to display their own finery. They were usually "prodigeously fine" on such occasions. At one wedding a certain nobleman turned up in a suit of fine yellow cloth richly trimmed with silver lace, which Miss Anne thought "a comical choice".<sup>16</sup> To us it does sound rather like the costume worn by the prince in a pantomime, but one would have expected her to be used to that kind of array. By modern standards it was no more comical than the suit of silk in "redish and green mixed, full trimmed" which Lord Fife wore some forty years later.<sup>17</sup>

Some men were really every bit as interested in their clothes as the women, and treated them as a matter of first importance. Laurence Oliphant of Gask seems to have been one of them. When he went to camp in 1715 to take part in the Jacobite rebellion, he took with him as part of his battle-dress no less than eighteen fine shirts, eighteen cravats, three coarse linen shirts and three night-shirts, as well as three pairs of silk stockings, a pair of Kilmarnock hose and a pair of under-stockings.<sup>18</sup> In quieter times, naturally, dress was a still more absorbing interest. If a bale of men's suiting happened to be delivered to any house, especially in an out-of-the-way district, tales of it spread far and wide. A case in point occurred in Caithness in 1735: the Laird of Mey heard that a local minister had received some cloth of a pleasing shade from Edinburgh, and was straightway filled with envy. He wrote to the minister, therefore, asking whether he might buy it. But the minister replied, politely but firmly, that he had ordered it for a

suit for himself. He gave the names of two Thurso merchants who had cloth of the same colour; but he warned the laird, not attempting to conceal his pride, that it was not of the same fine quality.<sup>19</sup> The clergy at that time very often wore blue, and this particular minister, at least, would undoubtedly have felt miserable in clerical grey or black. As to that, even the learned Dr. Alexander Carlyle had something of the peacock in him. Writing to his wife many years later to describe his new portrait he said, with innocent vanity, "It looks like a cardinal, it is so gorgeously dressed. It is in a pink damask night-gown."<sup>20</sup> (He was not suggesting that anybody went to bed in pink damask—"night-gown" was simply the term for a dressing-gown. But even that rather unconventional garb was then frequently worn for a formal portrait.)

Gentlemen of fashion gave particular attention to their gloves and their shirts. Gloves had to be spotless. The tale is told that when Lord Mark Kerr dropped one of his on the stairs of an Edinburgh coffee-house, somewhere about the year 1750, he disdained to pick it up lest it were soiled; but he considerably placed the other by its side, so that somebody less fastidious than himself might have the pleasure of finding a pair.<sup>21</sup>

As regards shirts, men could not always afford to be so fussy as they would have liked to be. Early in the century, when body linen was seldom changed, even the nobility frequently wore shirts of coarse quality with detachable fronts and cuffs of finer linen<sup>22</sup>—a custom which was common in England, too, and has never wholly died out. But later on, in Scotland as in England, the best shirts were made entirely of fine white linen, with frills or "chitterlings",<sup>23</sup> and nobody worthy of the name of beau would wear any other. One gentleman who was particularly "shirt-conscious" was Balnespick, of Inverness-shire. In February 1772 he seems to have been quite worried about the state of his wardrobe. "All the night shirts I have", he lamented in his account book, "is only 20 and one useless. All the fine shirts are only 6." But by June things



were improving: "I have of tolerable fine shirts ten and twenty two of coarse". In 1779 he had thirty-eight, six of them new<sup>24</sup>—enough, surely, to allow him a reasonable choice.

Quite small boys had to wear frilly shirts "for best"—a great handicap in tree-climbing and other childish joys. It is doubtful, really, whether eighteenth-century children could ever have been as keen on dressing-up as their elders were. The miniature editions of their parents' costume which they had to wear for parties must have spoilt a good deal of their fun. There is a hint of that in the letter which Sir Alexander Dick's eleven-year-old daughter wrote to him, in 1760, describing a ball she had attended. "I was dressed", she said, "in my green gown with gold trimmings and nothing about me but what you would have liked except my train which was a little troublesome." She went on to suggest, with anxious diplomacy, that if her father objected to the train she would be quite willing to sacrifice it.<sup>25</sup> And as Sir Alexander was an understanding father we may be reasonably certain that he *did* object.

At ordinary times children were dressed very plainly, even inadequately. Some of the sons of the gentry, especially in the Highlands, went about looking like little ragamuffins. Thrift apart (and that was most likely a powerful motive), there seems to have been some idea of hardening children to endure discomfort. Thus in January 1713 young Kenneth Mackenzie's tutor, who was at St. Andrews with him, wrote to the boy's father asking him to send a pair of thick stockings: Kenny was in class for five hours a day without a fire; his stockings were thin, and his mother would not allow him to wear two pairs; consequently his heels were sore with chilblains. Fortunately in this case the laird was not so hard as his wife, and a few weeks later the tutor was able to report that the heels were now better, thanks to the thick stockings. Kenneth's brother, Alexander, by contrast, had a delightfully warm pair of breeches, lined with two sheepskins and a half;<sup>26</sup> but in April 1713 Kenneth himself wrote to his father: "Our Clothes (being now

threed bare) will need to be renewed when you shall think convenient".<sup>27</sup> It was not purely a matter of expense. At that time a boy could be provided with a complete everyday outfit fairly cheaply, even allowing for eighteenth-century monetary values. It was only a year, for instance, since the schoolmaster of Fowlis had acknowledged the receipt of £25 : 18 : 6 Scots (not much more than £2 sterling) "for mounting William Oliphant in Coat, Vest, Breeches, Shirts, Cravats, & other necessary Aboulziements".<sup>28</sup>

Boys' ordinary dress does not seem to have varied much in style in the course of the century. It was always rather shapeless. A typical outfit, as worn by Ayrshire boys, was a simple tunic, usually blue, fitted closely to the upper part of the body and hanging open and loose below. The boys either went bareheaded or wore a light bonnet.<sup>29</sup> A more homely garb it would be difficult to find, and one can imagine the shouts of derision with which Edinburgh boys would greet any newcomer to school who was dressed in such a way. As far as that goes, they were none too stylishly dressed themselves. Most of them wore a round black hat, a plain shirt (except on dress occasions) fastened at the neck by a black ribbon, a double-breasted cloth waistcoat, which could be buttoned either side (for convenience when it began to get dirty), a single-breasted jacket, brown corduroy breeches, tied at the knees by a knot of brown tape, stockings of worsted for winter or blue cotton for summer, and clumsy shoes made to wear on either foot, with brass or copper buckles. The coat and waistcoat were always bright blue, grass green, scarlet, or some other glaring colour. "I remember well", Lord Cockburn tells us, "the pride with which I was once rigged out in a scarlet waistcoat and a bright green coat."<sup>30</sup>

Girls were also simply dressed, as a rule. When they were at home or visiting close friends they wore "jupps"—short woollen gowns with closely fitting bodices,<sup>31</sup> very much like the French jupes from which they took their name.<sup>32</sup> They were generally made up of stripes of different colours. Their mothers (when not on pleasure bent) wore serviceable

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dresses of a similar pattern, but longer, and made of drugget, printed cloth, linen or cotton. There were, of course, local variations in these more homely kinds of dress. Communications were still too bad to bring about any real merging of styles. So the women of Perth, for instance, still kept their distinctive blue plaid petticoats with short gowns to match, and the married ones among them their close caps, or mutches, trimmed with ribbons.<sup>33</sup> Railways and multiple stores between them have since been sad destroyers of local tradition.

According to a contemporary writer, the informal dress of both sexes was often coarse and slovenly in the extreme. Gentlemen used to walk about all the morning in greasy night-caps and dirty night-gowns (dressing-gowns) or thread-bare coats.<sup>34</sup> And we have to remember that "morning" in the dress sense, then as now, meant any time before dinner; and dinner was getting later and later—five o'clock or after, by the end of the century. Needless to say, some men preferred to look respectable even though they were not just off to some important function. They mostly wore short cloth coats and blue bonnets, of the same kind that French countrymen were wearing, and Scots and French alike kept on their bonnets in the house, except for taking them off and holding them to their faces while they said grace.<sup>35</sup>

For rough wear both sexes generally had underclothes made of "harn", a linen cloth woven from the tow thrown off from the flax when it had been passed through the hackle. It was spun and bleached at home. Some wore flannel, described as "plaiding". But for "best" the well-to-do bought fine linen from the Continent.<sup>36</sup> Lady Grisell Baillie sometimes bought forty ells of it at a time, for shifts, aprons and drawers<sup>37</sup>—and as yet there were no sewing-machines—but Lady Grisell had a knack of finding people plenty to do.

Probably the greatest difference between the ordinary dress of English people and the Lowland Scots was in the matter of shoes and stockings. Scott enthusiasts will

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remember how, when Jeanie Deans set out from Edinburgh to London, she intended to walk the whole way barefoot, keeping her shoes for special occasions; but when she got to Durham her bare feet began to attract attention. Thereafter "she conformed to the national extravagance of wearing shoes and stockings for the whole day", to her great discomfort. In England, according to Adam Smith, leather shoes were already regarded as a necessity even by the poorest of both sexes. In Scotland, on the other hand, although men would not be seen without shoes of some kind, the poorer women regularly walked about barefoot, while in France neither men nor women bothered much about footgear.<sup>38</sup> But in actual fact it was not only the poor in Scotland who went without shoes. We find Lord George Murray writing in 1745 to his daughter Amelia: "I recommend to you to be always neat, especially about the feet, for nothing is more becoming a young person like you than to wear stockings and shoes".<sup>39</sup> Either somebody had been "telling tales" or he was judging by what he had seen of other girls. It is quite likely that some of them were tomboys enough to run about with their brothers with naked feet. Dr. Johnson, as we know, found that in the western isles the sons of gentlemen quite often ran about barefoot.<sup>40</sup> And in the Highlands and even in some Lowland districts the boys went unshod to school, especially in summer; and well-to-do young women (Glasgow ones among them) might be seen setting off to a fair in a neighbouring town, carrying their shoes and stockings and stopping towards the end of their journey to wash their feet and put them on.<sup>41</sup> It is all a matter of taste. In the eyes of an eminent French visitor to Glasgow, towards the end of the century, bare feet merely added to a damsel's charm.<sup>42</sup>

As shoes were in such low repute in any case, it is not surprising that people seldom bothered to clean them. Sir John Foulis, round about 1700, did occasionally buy "blackballs" to clean his leather shoes,<sup>43</sup> but it was a long time before shoe-cleaning became a daily habit. Townsfolk

seldom cleaned their shoes at all except on Saturday night, and then they softened them with oil and grease rather than polished them.<sup>44</sup> And in the country, quite late in the century, artificial shoe-blackening was unknown, "except a little human spittle, and soot swept from the bottom of a pot might be so called".<sup>45</sup> Those who did try to have shiny shoes had sometimes to put up with a good deal of ridicule—John Law of Lauriston, for one: he was nicknamed "Jessamy John" for the careful way in which he polished his shoes with oil of jessamine.<sup>46</sup> Jessamine had at least a pleasant scent, but when James Ferrier (father of the novelist) was a schoolboy his foster-mother did her best to brighten his shoes by smearing them all over with train oil. The smell was so insufferable that the poor boy was hooted and driven out of school.<sup>47</sup> Such experiences were discouraging, to say the least. But early in the following century the great names of Day and Martin were displayed at John o' Groat's house; and, in the hopeful words of a contemporary writer: "Even to know that there is such a thing as liquid blacking in the world may excite the desire to possess it"! <sup>48</sup>

In the Highlands, where it was rare, on a week-day, to see a woman or a child wearing shoes (and where, even at the present day, children still run about without them), it was equally rare to come across a man who was not wearing brogues. The original ones were of raw hide. They wore out quickly, but they were useful in rock-climbing, for the hold which they gave to the feet—which may have been why they were still used in St. Kilda in the nineteenth century. They were superseded elsewhere by brogues of tanned leather, made with a single sole and open at the sides to let out water.<sup>49</sup>

It was rare to find a man barefoot, as we have said, but it was not unknown. Edward Burt once visited a Highland gentleman, about the year 1730, and was surprised to find him without either shoes or stockings. He wore no breeches, but simply a short coat and a shirt, not much longer, which hung between his thighs.<sup>50</sup> His outfit seems to have been

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somewhat incomplete (although it was almost matched, many years later, in Shetland<sup>51</sup>). The full Highland dress consisted of a brimless bonnet, a short coat, a waistcoat (five or six inches longer), short stockings and brogues. Gentlemen, but few besides, wore the "trowze"—breeches and stockings in one piece, and drawn on together. Over all they wore a plaid.<sup>52</sup>

Boswell has given us a picture of a gentleman of Skye who was "completely the figure of a gallant Highlander. . . . He had his Tartan plaid thrown about him, a large blue bonnet with a knot of black ribband like a cockade, a brown short coat of a kind of duffil, a Tartan waistcoat with gold buttons and gold button-holes, a bluish philibeg, and Tartan hose. He had jet black hair tied behind, and was a large stately man." <sup>53</sup> That was in 1773. But by then it was rare to see Highland dress at all. The law for its abolition, after the 1745 rebellion, had become fairly generally obeyed.<sup>54</sup>

Whatever the political necessity for the Act, it came as a great nuisance to families which were not used to wearing anything but the Highland costume. They had first to find out what they *were* allowed to wear and then to set about getting it made. William Mackenzie of Gruinard, to be on the safe side, wrote to an Inverness bailie for a copy of the Act and its amendments, and went on: "As we cannot appear in our country habit any more, [you] may send me some swatches of your cloths and fresees, and acquaint the prices".<sup>55</sup> Not everybody was so law-abiding. Several Highlanders were arrested during the next few years for wearing plaids. Others went out of their way to be awkward by keeping only just within the law. One was arrested for wearing a blanket in the form of a philibeg, but he could not be convicted because it was not tartan. And the commanding officer in North and South Morar was in a quandary because the inhabitants had begun to wear stuff trousers no longer than the kilt, or philibeg, and he did not know whether to regard them as part of the Highland dress or not.<sup>56</sup> It looks as if the statement in *Humphry Clinker* might

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have been true, that the majority of Highlanders, impatient at having to wear breeches, wore them "not in the proper place, but on poles or long staves over their shoulders"!

The plaids were a real loss, for they had been just as useful by night as by day. No matter where a Highlander had to sleep, on a heather mattress or even on the bare earth, rolled in his plaid he would be snug and warm. That was no doubt why Alexander Dunbar, a volunteer in Liège in 1705, wrote home for "ane night gounne . . . I mean ane Highland plaid . . . for that is ane thing I cannot want either summer or winter".<sup>57</sup> But, on second thoughts, Highlanders probably went on using the plaid to sleep in long after its general prohibition; they were not *all* law-abiding in all respects. Or perhaps they adopted the practice of the people of Galloway, who, when they went to bed, took off "not only their cloaths, but their very shirts", and wrapped themselves in a blanket.<sup>58</sup> If the English Parson Woodforde and his household had not yet taken to night-shirts, pyjamas and the rest,<sup>59</sup> we need hardly condemn Scotland as being behind the times.

Communications being what they were, the ordinary informal dress had usually to be made at home, or at least locally. The material for gentlemen's homespun clothing and for ladies' dresses was often spun by the women of the household and woven in the village. Some families began at the very beginning: they grew their own flax and bred their own sheep—and the sheep provided not only wool but also the bone required for making buttons. In some districts, as, for example, in Caithness, tenants were required to clothe their landlords as well as feed them; they had to provide wool and a considerable quantity of spun lint. Some proprietors clung to their rights until late in the century.<sup>60</sup>

Sometimes the cloth went to a local dyer to be finished, particularly where, as in Perth, men wanted Sunday coats of the very light Dunblane blue.<sup>61</sup> Otherwise, except where bright colours were wanted, if the sheep were carefully selected dyeing was unnecessary. Many countrymen used

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to breed their own black sheep specially to provide themselves with coarse black cloth, known as kelt. They made grey cloth by mixing this black wool with white; and they used other coloured fleeces to make cloth of different shades of grey, brown and russet. Pure white ones were the least valued of any until late in the century, when dyeing was a well-established art.<sup>62</sup>

Some housewives, independent souls, disdained to send their yarn to a weaver (even if there was one at hand); they preferred to knit it themselves. A typical Aberdeenshire laird, in the middle of the century, wore a coat, breeches and stockings all knitted by his wife.<sup>63</sup> There was quite a craze for knitting, and many women took it up as a hobby. At one time Edinburgh ladies used even to knit their own thread stockings and gloves at the tea-table—"A Piece of Industry not common to Ladies in other Parts!"<sup>64</sup> After about 1760 it was not common there either. The gentry then preferred to buy the miraculously fine hose for which Aberdeen was becoming famous. (Some of the stockings were made on such fine needles that they took a woman six months to knit, and cost as much as five guineas a pair.<sup>65</sup>) Now that stockings were easy to buy ready-made, girls began to rebel at having to knit for their brothers. The girls of one Glasgow family, late in the century, went as far as refusing to knit worsted stockings for their brothers at all until they were promised, for every pair they finished, a pair of fine white linen thread ones for themselves, bought from a hosier's shop.<sup>66</sup>

Stockings could not be obtained everywhere, and shoes, too, in some parts were almost impossible to obtain ready-made. There was nothing for it, then, but for people to make their own. In Mull and other western islands, throughout the century, they made their own brogues from skins tanned with willow-bark, sewing them with thongs of leather.<sup>67</sup> Highlanders used at one time to dye the skins for theirs with tormentil roots or in bog-water,<sup>68</sup> but by the 'seventies many of them bought brogues ready-made at the Lowland fairs, at two to four shillings a pair.<sup>69</sup> Brogues



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were vastly superior to the "rivelines" commonly worn in Shetland, which consisted merely of a piece of skin, with the hair outside, folded round the foot and laced on with a strip of leather.<sup>70</sup> But for real elegance there was nothing to beat the women of St. Kilda: their menfolk might wear simple brogues, but they themselves had shoes of gannets' skins, and were said to look like "feathered Mercuries".<sup>71</sup>

The shoes made in the Lowlands, of home-tanned leather, were plain and made to last. The making up was generally done, roughly enough, by a local shoemaker,<sup>72</sup> and the results must have been rather hard on the feet. Luckily, corn-plasters had already been invented—Sir John Foulis used to buy them! But by 1790 most districts seem to have been well supplied with shoemakers, sometimes as many as nine to a thousand people,<sup>73</sup> and craftsmanship had a chance to be less rough and ready. The makers were now able to keep supplies in stock, as well as making to order. Shoes usually cost two or three shillings a pair, but in at least one district of Aberdeen they were sold by length, at a penny an inch.<sup>74</sup>

The village community included tailors as well as shoemakers—usually anything from six to ten to a parish. The tailor seldom worked in his own home. He went to his patron's house, accompanied by his apprentice carrying the goose and the smoothing board, and stayed there while he made and repaired clothes for the whole family. He was fed and lodged by his employer, provided with the cloth and usually with the thread,<sup>75</sup> and paid a daily wage. The wage varied from time to time and from place to place. In Perth and in Lethnot (Angus), in 1750, it was only 2d. a day, and the food given in some households was very poor.<sup>76</sup> Dumbarton employers had to pay 4d., and in 1748 the Council, evidently a little anxious about their future new suits, passed a special resolution that any tailor refusing to work out of his own house when required, or asking a higher wage than 4d. a day, should be fined.<sup>77</sup> But prices generally were rising, and tailoring costs with them, and by 1790 the

money payment in Lethnot had risen to 6d. a day, while in Glasgow it was 8d. for a tailor or 6d. for a sewing-woman.<sup>78</sup> The charges had gone up, but they were still low compared with the amount which the future Parson Woodforde had to pay in 1763, while at Oxford, for mending his gown and a little rip in his coat. The tailor charged him a shilling, "which", said Woodforde, "is very exorbitant indeed and for the future will have nothing ever done by him any more in the World".<sup>79</sup>

Dr. Johnson was surprised to find that a laird living in the Hebrides had a tailor from the mainland to work for him six times a year;<sup>80</sup> but actually the visiting tailor was a familiar figure in all parts of Scotland. Just occasionally a tailor might be found who would work at home by the piece. In 1719, for instance, an Elgin tailor sent the Laird of Thunderton a bill for £1:10s. Scots "to making an scarlet clok to yer Laidy", £1 "to making an stiched night-goun to hir Leship", and £12 "to making an pair stiched stees to Mrs. Bettie", among other items.<sup>81</sup> But a custom which Edward Burt found to be general in Inverness, about the year 1730, and which was not unknown even in Edinburgh, must have made it an unpleasant business to take work home. To prevent theft on the part of the tailor the whole of the material, including the tapes and thread, was weighed before his eyes when he came to collect it; and when he brought home the finished garment it was put in the scales with all the unused shreds, and together they were expected to weigh the same as before.<sup>82</sup>

The productions of these local tailors, generally speaking, were ill-fitting and lacking in style. But improvements were on the way. In the 'eighties the sixpence-a-day sempstress who could be hired in Glasgow would bring with her paper patterns of the latest fashions, ready to cut out.<sup>83</sup> And by the end of the century some of the inhabitants even of Orkney were as fashionably dressed as any in the kingdom, for dressed figures of men and women, as big as a child, were sent frequently from London so that the milliners and tailors could see the newest fashions of gowns, suits, hats

and head-dresses. These fashion-dolls (which had probably come in the first place from Paris) cost half a guinea, and could be bought by private people for the information of their tailors.<sup>84</sup>

The growing use of patterns did not mean that the whole of Scotland had suddenly turned fashionable. An Argyll clergyman was still to be found who would boast that his coat, vest, breeches, shirt, neck-cloth, stockings and everything else he had on had been made by his wife.<sup>85</sup> But perhaps it is significant that by then it was interesting enough to mention.

Early in the century tailors spent most of their time making up homespun; but obviously, when it came to the fine fabrics required for ceremonial dress the material could not be produced at home. Edinburgh was the usual shopping-centre for finery of all kinds. The Rose family of Kilravock sent there for Margaret's wedding outfit, in 1701, and the next generation still ordered hoops and silk stuffs from there.<sup>86</sup> Many of the gentry did the same. Some people, too, sent there regularly for their shoes and stockings, and were probably well advised to do so to make sure of a shapely cut; they apparently cost no more than a local cobbler would have charged. The Laird of Thunderton's account with an Edinburgh shoemaker in 1717-18, for instance, included such items as 5s. Scots for "ane pair of slippers with heils", 16s. for "ane pair of button boots, your honor" and 3s. for "ane pair of seamed Maraken shoes, your Lady".<sup>87</sup> The laird's stockings were more difficult to obtain, judging by a report sent to him by another Edinburgh dealer: "There is noe scarlet stockings with a gold-coloured gushett, to be had at this place", the merchant apologized; "nor noe scarlet stockings that is fine, to be had here, either with or without a coloured gushett; for what wee have here is not above six shillings from London, which cannot be fine, for scarlet".<sup>88</sup>

Fit being a matter of trifling importance, some people preferred to have their clothes sent ready-made rather than buy cloth by the yard. Simon, Lord Lovat, who used to

have suits made in Edinburgh for himself and his sons, once ordered in addition a rose-coloured damask petticoat, a yellow silk gown, a brown poplin gown and other pretty things for his daughter Sibie.<sup>89</sup> The problem was, when finery was ordered from Edinburgh for the north, to get it delivered. What Lord Lovat did, in 1732, was to send a messenger on horseback to collect his new clothes and bring them to Beaufort; and he sent special instructions that they were to be properly packed and that the horse was not to be hurt, as it cost £20. Some years later he arranged for a coat to be sent north by post, together with a good hat with a gold button and a gold loop.<sup>90</sup> He had several transactions of that kind, but whether he ever paid for them is a different matter. In his accounts for 1744 there is a distinctly disagreeable entry: "To Shaw the Taylor £10, if he consents to Discharge all bygone Accounts for it. If he wont do that. Not a farthing."<sup>91</sup>

Delivery was complicated by the tremendous amount of material which went to the making of a fashionable hooped gown.<sup>92</sup> Even "tuo swits of Cloaths for tuo young lasses", in 1722, took as much as twenty-six yards of silk each.<sup>93</sup> An outsize lady had to buy far more, with about six yards extra trimming as well.<sup>94</sup> When the material was ordered without patterns, as it very often was, disappointment was sometimes bound to follow. Some housewives left the ordering to their husbands, and a thankless job it was. One man who seems to have had a particularly difficult time ordering dress-lengths for his family was Bailie John Steuart of Inverness. In 1733, evidently after a good deal of grumbling by his wife and daughter, he wrote to the London merchant with whom he dealt saying that the twenty-four yards of silk for his daughter Margaret had arrived safely, but the women thought it too dear and objected to the pattern on it; they would keep it for the present, but would sell it to the first pedlar who would take it. Moreover, his wife had been asking about the thirty-eight yards of white worsted camlet which she had sent up some months before to be dyed green and watered;

would the merchant please be good enough to return it by the first ship coming that way.<sup>95</sup>

However discontented Mrs. Steuart was with her husband's purchases, she evidently preferred him to do the business. He ordered regularly from London and Edinburgh; and once, in 1721, he wrote to a merchant in Leghorn for thirty yards of the best mantua black silk, about a yard wide, to make two full suits of women's clothes.<sup>96</sup> There was nothing unusual in buying from abroad. The fine lace which most ladies possessed had usually been brought from Flanders,<sup>97</sup> sometimes by their sons who were sent to the Low Countries to finish their education. And when those same young men had acquired their full share of worldly wisdom they took the opportunity, just before they came home, to lay in a good stock of shirts. If not exactly smuggled, they were certainly bought on easy terms. So, in 1718, we find Alexander Leslie writing from Leyden to his brother, Lord Balgonie, "If you want Holland for shirts, I shall endeavour to furnish you or my lord [Leven], but they must be made and washed here for fear of duty. . . . I have taken of two duzen for myself, for I will perhaps never have so good occasion again."<sup>98</sup> Cheating the customs officer was looked upon as a sportsman's risk, and gentlemen quite unashamedly smuggled in lace and other fripperies for themselves—George Dempster among them. Writing from Dover to Sir Adam Fergusson, in 1756, on his way back from the Continent, he said, "I write this . . . under dismal apprehensions for my lace which is just going to the custom house—but I hope to trick these watchful blood hounds".<sup>99</sup>

Not everybody approved of these purchases from abroad, whether the transactions were regular or not. Already by 1730 some Scottish reformers were getting worried about the neglect of Scottish homespun even for good Yorkshire broadcloth, thinking it an ominous sign of national decay.<sup>100</sup> Their weighty arguments had a rather frivolous outcome. Various ladies, really not at all convinced of their duty to give up foreign silks and laces, thought that it would be

rather amusing, all the same, to hold a ball at which the company should be dressed entirely in Scottish manufactures. The ball duly took place in 1730 or thereabouts, and was a tremendous success. Elizabeth Mure and her sisters were there, and in her opinion they were as well dressed as anybody; their gowns were made of linen at 2s. 6d. a yard and their head-dresses and ruffles of Paisley muslin at 4s. 6d., with fourpenny edging from Hamilton.<sup>101</sup> But the ball came and went, and it is doubtful whether the Edinburgh shops sold a yard the less of French silk on account of it.

In the 'seventies the matter cropped up again. A group of gentlemen, seriously alarmed at the still growing preference for foreign materials, formed the Grand Climacteric Club, binding themselves to wear only the manufactures of their own country. About the same time a Falkirk clothier formed a club of about a hundred gentlemen, farmers and others, who paid 2s. 3d. a month and in return were provided with cloth for all their families.<sup>102</sup> But the shop windows became more and more tempting, and the enthusiasm for such a dull cause gradually dwindled away. By 1790 ministers everywhere were complaining that men now refused to wear homespun, and women no longer spun the wool for their gowns and petticoats, but wore the finest printed cottons, or even silk gowns, with white stockings and cloth shoes.<sup>103</sup>

Even the best of clothes wear out, but in eighteenth-century Scotland they were a long time in being discarded. Lady Grisell Baillie's household book has repeated entries relating to such things as "blew serg for Grisies coat helping [mending]", and "mending the bairns dust-gouns". Lady Foulis, another careful housewife, was so hard put to it to keep her family decently clothed that in 1702 she brought home the black cloth which covered their seat in the kirk, and used it for clothes for her son Robert. That being so, it is not surprising to find Sir John himself paying 5s. for mending his "sad coloured coat and justicoat".<sup>104</sup> Even Lord Lovat was not above an occasional patch.<sup>105</sup> But James Balfour of Pilrig has set us a problem: was it artistry

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or simply lack of blue material that caused his tailor to put black sleeves into his old blue coat? <sup>106</sup>

Clothes which were too old to renovate could sometimes be cut down for the children. That was one of the dreary tasks of the visiting tailor. One such tailor, who gave evidence in the Court of Session in 1722, said that while he worked for a certain family he altered a black plush coat, tipped the button-holes with silver twist, and "made down father's scarlet breeches for Jimmy".<sup>107</sup> Jimmy might have fared worse. Some clothes were more obviously "handed down", as we can see from Lady Anne Lindsay's account of what she and her sister Margaret wore when they paddled in the glen beside their home in Fife, about the year 1760: "We wore yellow and silver silks, which had been made into slips out of an old wedding-gown of Lady Balcarres'; the pattern which had done for one being scanty for two, it had been flounced with blue gauze, which tucking up, with our trains of capacious silver flowers, and jumping in, Pharaoh's daughter made not a more splendid appearance when pulling Moses out from the bullrushes".<sup>108</sup>

The road from Portpatrick to Dumfries swarmed with Irish beggars. One class of them, called troggers, brought Irish linen which they were glad to barter for old woollen clothes.<sup>109</sup> But elsewhere old clothes were hardly ever sold. They were either given away in charity or used by the servants for dusters or floor-cloths.<sup>110</sup> That was where the children came into their own. As we have seen, men's clothes abounded in metal buttons. As soon as they had the chance the children cut them all off and used them for the great game of butts, or buttons—a version of pitch and toss in which buttons were the prizes. A lucky boy sometimes won strings of them as long as himself, and he straightway sold them as old metal to a coppersmith or a brassfounder for 3d. or 4d.<sup>111</sup> It may well be said that nothing in this world is wasted.

## Chapter IX

# The Toilet

To judge from some contemporary jibes, the eighteenth-century Scot seldom washed at all. Admittedly, one of the testiest complaints came from an irate traveller who stayed at an inn in Kirk Largo, as late as 1800, and found there no washing facilities.<sup>1</sup> But he ought to have known that the average Scottish innkeeper made no pretence of offering a home from home, and that what people put up with in his hostelry was no indication of how they lived in the ordinary way. Moreover, most of the critics were English, and English standards of cleanliness, although by modern ideas they were nothing wonderful, were high enough to make foreigners write home about them. We know how amazed De Saussure was, when he came over in 1726, to find that people washed their hands and faces every day.<sup>2</sup>

In any case, we have definite information that at least one Scot *did* wash: the old Laird of Cultywhey, near Crieff, used to wash his hands and face every morning at a spout of water near his house. Then, but not before, he took off his bonnet and said his morning prayer: "From the pride of the Grahams, the wind [vain arrogance] of the Murrays, and the ire of the Drummonds, gude Lord defend me and mine".<sup>3</sup> He may have been exceptional; according to one authority Highlanders as a rule washed only on Sundays, when they dashed water on their faces and wet their feet at the nearest stream.<sup>4</sup> That agrees with the account of the scapegoat lady of fiction, Mrs. MacClarty, still handsome "notwithstanding . . . four days' soil (for this was Thursday)".<sup>5</sup> We remember her surprise when



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her guest wanted to wash, and the amount of brain-racking she had to do before she could devise the means: "it's easy to gie ye water eneugh", she said, rather bewildered, "though I'm sure I dinna ken what to put it in, unless ye tak ane o' the porridge plates: or maybe the calf's luggie may do better, for it'll gie ye eneugh o' room".<sup>6</sup>

In the country it was apparently not the regular custom to wash indoors, even in the houses of the nobility. Some of the great residences had cottages in the surrounding woods which took the place of bathrooms: they contained dressing-rooms in which men could warm themselves after plunging into a submerged tank of cold water. During the winter months, not unnaturally, the ceremony was apt to be overlooked.<sup>7</sup> The modern houses in Glasgow and other towns were equipped with bathrooms; but elsewhere, if anybody wanted to bathe in the house it usually meant carrying a tub upstairs specially from the wash-house. It can well be believed that the laundry-maids at the Doune, Rothiemurchus, were none too pleased that one of the guests in the house, spoken of as "the very clean gentleman", had a bath twice a day and changed his shirts many a time a week.<sup>8</sup> For the period that *was* a little excessive; in the 'sixties even the English royal children were bathed only every other Monday.<sup>9</sup>

To accompany their bath Edinburgh people, at least, could buy white toilet soap, which at the beginning of the century cost about a penny an ounce. Sir John Foulis's usual choice was Castile,<sup>10</sup> but there were all kinds to be had, from England if not from the local shops—Joppa, Smyrna, Jerusalem, Genoa, Venice, Castile, Curd, Irish, Windsor and many more. Most fashionable ladies scorned to use any of them, but preferred to entrust their complexions to "wash balls"—nasty concoctions of powdered rice, flour, starch powder, white lead and orris root.<sup>11</sup> They cost 4s. Scots (4d. sterling)<sup>12</sup> where they could be had at all. But in some of the more remote districts people could buy neither soap nor wash balls: they had either to make their own or to use oatmeal instead.

Sir John Foulis used his Castile soap for shaving—rather an aristocratic habit, for in Galloway and other districts, at that time, razors had not yet come into general use, and men simply clipped their beards with scissors on Saturday night, in order to look presentable on Sunday.<sup>13</sup> But Sir John had two, and bought a hone to sharpen them on and a case to hold them. He tried at one time to train one of his regular servants to shave him; but, although he bought him a sheep's head and some soap and told him to practise, the scheme apparently did not work. After that he had a boy in, once or twice a week, to "barbarize" him, and paid him 5s. Scots (5d. sterling) or thereabouts for each visit. In 1706 he arranged to pay a regular fee of £2 : 18s. Scots a quarter; but that still seems rather expensive. It works out at nearly £1 sterling a year, and in England, more than fifty years later, when general prices had risen, Parson Woodforde was still paying his barber only 12s. a year to shave him twice a week and dress two wigs each time.<sup>14</sup>

In the country there was seldom a barber to call upon. That was why Lady Grisell Baillie, as we learn from her household book, after appointing a new butler for Mellerstain, made him extra useful by sending him to Edinburgh and spending £1 : 1 : 6 sterling "for learning him to shave". In the towns that would hardly have been worth while. Perth, for instance, had a large number of barbers, and the regular charge for shaving, during most of the century, was only a farthing.<sup>15</sup>

Among Sir John Foulis's regular purchases was "whyting for teeth". It must have been rather disappointing to him, considering that he was so much in advance of his time in cleaning his teeth at all, that in 1703 he had to pay £2 to Mr. Strachan in the Canongate for making him two false ones. (They were probably not unsightly; the vessels sailing between Orkney and Hudson's Bay used to bring back fine ivory for the purpose.<sup>16</sup>) The efforts of the Rev. Alexander Carlyle's wife were also ill rewarded: in 1765 she was said to be suffering from "a very severe rheumatism

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in her teeth, owing to their being cleaned too much".<sup>17</sup> But what really made teeth ache, said the *Scots Magazine*, was the sudden transition from hot soups to cold water, which enervated them. "The teeth being in this age so much attended to", it was thought fit to give a few general instructions: they should be cleaned at night; powder should never be used (it was bad for them, unless it was fine charcoal or Peruvian bark), but instead it was advisable to use a dry brush or lukewarm water.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, whatever the usual practice, a French visitor to Glasgow and the Hebrides was full of admiration for the fine, white teeth of the people he met there.<sup>19</sup>

For hairdressing most countrywomen, in the early eighteenth century, had to adopt simple styles because there was no professional skill available.<sup>20</sup> They wore their hair in ringlets, flowing over their shoulders and kept off their faces by a snood, or sometimes a comb. Some of them, especially in the Highlands, washed their hair in a decoction of the young buds of birch trees, to give it a pleasant scent.<sup>21</sup> For women who did not bother overmuch about fashion the plain form of hairdressing continued throughout the century, in Glasgow as well as in the country.<sup>22</sup> But even in such a small place as Kirkmichael most women, by about 1760, had no intention of being left behind in the race for elegance. "Formerly", said the local critic, "their hair flowed in easy ringlets over their shoulders; not many years ago, it was bound behind into a cue; now, it spreads into a protuberance on the forehead, supported by cushions; sometimes, it is plain, and split in the middle. But who can describe the caprice of female ornament, more various than the changes of the moon!"<sup>23</sup>

In Edinburgh it was easy to have a fashionable coiffure: there was a young woman there in 1716 who advertised that she had recently come from London and could cut hair extremely well, and dress it in the newest style. Any ladies who went to her on Mondays or Thursdays could have their hair cut for sixpence; and at any other time it would be done as reasonably as anywhere else in town.<sup>24</sup>

## DOMESTIC LIFE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The charge for cutting and dressing a lady's hair in the 'fifties was 3s.<sup>25</sup> Although by then there were several barbers and wig-makers in Edinburgh there were very few hairdressers, and it was almost impossible to persuade one of them to work on a Sunday. But by 1780 there were three times as many, and, strange to say, Sunday was their busiest day. What was more, some of them advertised that they kept bears, which they killed as required for grease for ladies' and gentlemen's hair.<sup>26</sup>

A self-styled professor kept a hairdressing academy in Edinburgh during the 'eighties and lectured on the latest coiffures.<sup>27</sup> Ladies' hairdressing by that time was certainly a fine art. The head had first to be fitted with a wire frame covered with thin silk, or else with a high cushion; the hair, powdered and greased, was drawn up to cover this foundation; and the whole erection was finished off with feathers or ribbons or some other kind of ornament. The fashion called forth a grave warning in the *Scots Magazine* of the dangers of wire head-dresses during thunder-storms: "A lady who has her head surrounded with a wire cap, and her hair stuck full of metal pins, and who at the same time wears silk stockings, that is, stands upon dry silk, is to all intents and purposes an electrical conductor, insulated and prepared for collecting the fire from the atmosphere". The moral was pointed from an accident which befell a Mrs. Douglas of Kelso in those circumstances,<sup>28</sup> but other ladies evidently decided that the risk need not worry them.

The Rev. James Woodforde's niece Nancy had a great thrill when a hairdresser visited their Norfolk home in 1782 and, for half a guinea, dressed her hair in the latest style. "Very becoming", wrote her uncle in his diary. But a fortnight later, when she paid another 7s. for a hair-comb and cushion, "both entire new fashions", he was less enthusiastic and commented, "Fashions very dear following them".<sup>29</sup> It had become the height of gentility by then, both in England and Scotland, to have the hair dressed at home. If there was no member of the household qualified for such an important task, arrangements were made for a

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hairdresser to call every day. It was one of the daily sights of Glasgow, in the 'eighties, to see the wig-maker and hairdresser, all besmeared with hair-powder, bustling through the streets to attend his customers.<sup>30</sup> Hairdressers were regarded as among the minor aristocracy, and were said to be in the enviable position of going "from house to house, like gentlemen in the morning; cracking with Maister this or Madam that, as they soap their chins with scented-soap, or put their hair up in marching order either for kirk or playhouse. Then, at their leisure . . . they can pare corns to the gentry." <sup>31</sup>

As it happened, the gentry very often had their own private hairdressers. The Duchess of Gordon, in the 'seventies, had a Belgian on her staff who was particularly expert at the art; and, jealous of competition, she strictly forbade him to dress any lady's hair but her own.<sup>32</sup> It was as disappointing to him as it was to the ladies who tried to ingratiate themselves with him, for hairdressing had become a matter of first importance. Even gentlemen had begun to have their own hair dressed and powdered and tied with a ribbon, instead of shaving it off and wearing a wig.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes they had it curled. John MacDonald, for instance, personal servant to Mr. Hamilton of Bargeny House, spoke of putting his master's hair in papers at night,<sup>34</sup> and on another occasion of "letting out his curls".<sup>35</sup> When he was complimented on making hair stand up so well he merely replied that other people did not know how to use pomade; he saw no reason to confess that he had stiffened the pomatum with wax candles.<sup>36</sup>

MacDonald worked later on for James Coutts, the banker. That gentleman tried to combine new fashions and old by wearing a wig over his hair; but he insisted on having his hair dressed in such a way that nobody could tell there was anything but his own.<sup>37</sup> It was rather unusual to bother about that. Both men and women, late in the century, sometimes wore wigs which made no pretence to be real; they were made of wire—silver, gold or dark steel—and dressed with a curry comb.<sup>38</sup> Smollett had really no

need to pour ridicule on the French women who covered their heads with "a vast load of false hair, which is frizzled on the forehead, so as exactly to resemble the woolly heads of the Guinea negroes";<sup>39</sup> he should have looked nearer home.

A Swedish visitor to England in 1748, remarking that every country has its own customs, said that he doubted whether there was anywhere else where there were as many wigs as in England. He thought them very dear. A quite ordinary one cost a guinea; a really good one cost two.<sup>40</sup> Had he but known, Sir John Foulis, in Scotland, had paid seven and a half guineas for one over forty years before. Admittedly, it was described as a long one, and was probably bought to wear on his wedding-day. Usually he bought either a "Spanish bob", which cost about a guinea (or about 5s. for making, "the hair being his owne"), or the more formal "campaign periwig", costing up to £3: 10s. He sometimes bought two a year. The expense did not end with the purchase of the wig: he had to buy powder for it, a bottle of jessamine oil to scent it, and (if he did not already possess one) a block on which to place it overnight ready for his man to dress next morning; further, a very important item, there was the charge for "sealing" it, or drinking good luck to it—the usual convivial merry-making whenever a man appeared in anything new.<sup>41</sup>

There were several styles of wigs. Some of them were made from the very fair hair of Swedish and Norwegian women, and were imported ready-made (our Swedish traveller was evidently not aware of that).<sup>42</sup> The correct thing was for the wig to indicate its wearer's walk in life, but some gentlemen chose from the whole range. Hugh Rose of Kilravock, for instance, in one year bought both a bob wig (the kind often worn by tradesmen) and a cue wig with ribbons.<sup>43</sup> Some gentlemen wore "fly-perukes", others chose the "full bottom" type which was regularly worn by merchants. Clergymen, in the 'eighties, did normally keep to their distinctive headgear, a specially large, bushy wig, and irreverent small boys, as cheeky as any modern street urchin, used to keep themselves supplied

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with peeoy's (small fireworks) ready to slip into it at the first opportunity; in due course the "spitting devils" exploded, and the delighted little culprits were well advised to take wings to their feet.<sup>44</sup>

The *Scots Magazine* in 1770 gave instructions on how "To Change Red Hair to a Beautiful Brown", by boiling together in water an ounce each of black lead and of ebony shavings, bottling the mixture, and occasionally wetting a comb with it and passing it through the hair. Those who preferred their hair jet black had only to add two drachms of camphire to the ingredients.<sup>45</sup> But almost throughout the century most gentlemen used hair-powder, either on their wigs or on their own hair. There were several colours to be had. There was white powder, made from starch, plaster of Paris, flour and other things. Or there was black, made from starch and Japan ink, or sometimes simply of powdered coal dust. Or, for those who preferred a more natural effect, there was brown powder, made from starch and umber, and grey, made from the black mixture with extra starch added to it.<sup>46</sup> But in 1795 the government imposed a tax on all kinds of hair-powder, and virtually brought the fashion to an end. Even before that time the question of powdering or not had resolved itself into a test more of loyalty than of elegance. According to Lord Cockburn, "Short and undressed crops had been adopted in France. Our loyal, therefore, though beginning to tire of the greasy and dusty dirt, laid it on with profuse patriotism, while the discontented exhibited themselves ostentatiously in all the Jacobinism of clean natural locks."<sup>47</sup>

There was one English fashion which Scotswomen were late in adopting—the use of cosmetics. English women used carmine, yellow ochre, verdigris and all kinds of dye-stuffs to add colour to their faces.<sup>48</sup> French women, too, according to Smollett, plastered their faces and shoulders with rouge and paint.<sup>49</sup> But visitors to Scotland were delighted with the clear, natural skins of the ladies they met, innocent of any artificial colouring.<sup>50</sup> Lady Eglinton herself, who died in 1780 at the age of ninety-one and was

famous throughout her life for her beautiful complexion, never used anything besides sow's milk on her face.<sup>51</sup> And, unless Vincent Lunardi was grossly deceived, the next generation was equally free from borrowed charm: "No perfume shop supplies the beautiful colour that glows on their cheeks and lips", he wrote, in raptures; "it is the pure painting of health. . . . Nature has made them lovely, and they have not suffered the intruder Art to spoil her works."<sup>52</sup>

Although Scottish ladies may not have painted their faces, they did not object to using patches. In fact, they rather overdid the fashion. They seem to have lacked the nice discrimination of the French, who left such things to the young and beautiful.<sup>53</sup> Patches and wrinkles did not agree. Nevertheless, every fashionable lady in England and Scotland, until about 1750, had a patch-box in her dressing-closet;<sup>54</sup> and, whatever her age, she dabbed on one or two every time she wore full dress. To the unsophisticated they looked very strange—one of the inhabitants of St. Kilda who was persuaded to take a trip to Glasgow thought, to his horror, that they were blisters.<sup>55</sup>

By the end of the century the principal towns had no lack of dealers in cosmetics. Edinburgh was naturally the best provided of all, with perfumers' shops, as they were called, in every main street.<sup>56</sup> But by the 'nineties even Banff had a perfumer, who dealt in "such rare articles, as Neapolitan cream for the face, Persian dentifrice for the teeth, and Asiatic balsam for the hair".<sup>57</sup> The simple, unsophisticated lass might still be the delight of tourists from abroad, but in the towns she was becoming hard to find.



## Chapter X

### Health and Sanitation

Scotland, even more than England, suffered a high rate of sickness and mortality. Fevers and other epidemics swept the country; ague, attributed to the damp climate,<sup>1</sup> afflicted a large number of the population, and there were frequent outbreaks of colds, digestive troubles and other minor ailments. Adam Smith, noting that the Scots were less healthy than the English, offered in explanation that the Scottish diet of oatmeal was not so nourishing as one of wheaten bread;<sup>2</sup> but at this distance of time it seems more plausible to blame overcrowding and lack of proper sanitation.

Sanitary arrangements, depending first and foremost on the state of the water-supply, were not uniformly bad. In most towns there was a plentiful supply of water to be had at the market place from the conduit which usually stood close beside the market cross, as it did in England.<sup>3</sup> But there was a district here and there, such as Auchterarder (Perth), where there was no constant supply: the town stream dried up in summer, and the inhabitants had to go a considerable way for their water.<sup>4</sup>

Even where water was plentiful it might not be fit to drink. The inhabitants of Ayr decided that theirs was not. In 1747 a large number of them sent a petition to the town council complaining of the condition of one of the wells, "the springs wherof are frequently stopt by reason of rubbage and dirt being thrown into it by boys, and catts and dogs often thrown into it".<sup>5</sup> But there were wells innumerable, and the boys of Ayr were probably no more

mischievous than most. All things considered, perhaps it was not mere fad which made Lord Lovat send a retainer every day to Loch Ness, a distance of eight miles, for the water he drank; <sup>6</sup> or which, in the Rev. Dr. Somerville's household at Jedburgh, sent somebody every day to a spring a quarter of a mile away to fetch a large jugful of water for dinner.<sup>7</sup>

Most towns after about 1760 did begin to have an improved supply. Within a few years Dunfermline,<sup>8</sup> Kirkcudbright,<sup>9</sup> Montrose <sup>10</sup> and other places had leaden pipes laid down to bring water from sources perhaps a mile or more away. Perth was a little later in installing them, and managed until 1780 with wooden ones; <sup>11</sup> but a visitor to the town a few years later was much impressed by the numerous little wells, each about three feet high, which he saw in rows along both sides of the streets.<sup>12</sup>

Very few houses had water laid on. That did not matter so much where they consisted only of one or two storeys; but in Perth, with its tall houses accommodating sometimes fourteen families, it was no slight inconvenience that all the water used on the upper floors had to be carried there in buckets.<sup>13</sup>

Where there was a stream close to the house the opportunity was sometimes taken to carry some of the water into the house in lead pipes.<sup>14</sup> It was a luxury which the wealthier people soon came to demand, and, as one would expect, Glasgow quite early developed an advanced system of plumbing. A typical house advertised for sale there in 1781 had "a well, communicating by pipes with the house, and other conveniences".<sup>15</sup> Another one, better still, was equipped with "a pump-well in the yard, a convenient wash house with a pipe from the river, and a large and commodious cold bath".<sup>16</sup>

Edinburgh had its own way of solving the water problem. The town depended, as others did, on the public wells in the main streets; and the water was carried to them in pipes from a large cistern draining the Pentland Hills.<sup>17</sup> But a good deal of the water was wanted in the upper

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storeys of the lofty tenements, and the only way of getting it there was to carry it. That was done, fortunately for the domestic servants, by special water-carriers, men and women who spent the whole of their days doing little else.

The water-carriers pumped the water from the public wells into small casks; and, according to a contemporary writer, as there were more candidates than spouts, there was usually a group of wrangling claimants. The rest sat waiting, more or less placidly, on their kegs. When a carrier had filled his cask he slung it on his back and supported it by a leather strap which he held with his hand. The work was hard on the clothes, so the men usually wore old red jackets and the women had thick duffle greatcoats with black hats like the men's. Every house had its favourite "water caddie", who knew the wants of the family and the capacity of the single cistern, which he kept replenishing at his own discretion for a fee of a penny a barrel or thereabouts. The carriers never worked on Sundays.<sup>18</sup>

By the 'eighties this picturesque means of delivery was being given up. Disputes between the heritors, householders and town council of Edinburgh with regard to the financing of the water supply<sup>19</sup> had been long and bitter. Now at last any inhabitants who were willing to pay for private pipes to their houses were able to obtain them; and from that time the use of water increased at a tremendous rate.<sup>20</sup>

Where there was no water laid on, household sanitation was bound to be primitive. England was ahead of Scotland in that respect, but even in England water-closets were not installed until about 1775, and for some time afterwards they were faulty in design and consequently dangerous to health.<sup>21</sup> The whole system of refuse disposal was most unsatisfactory, in London as well as in less prosperous areas, and in the *Spectator* of 18th December 1711 there was a bitter complaint of the filth of the London streets. It accused householders of failing to sweep the road in front of their homes, and even of throwing ashes and refuse from their windows. The criticism was apparently justified, for as late as 1748

a Swedish visitor noticed that London servants threw the household refuse into the streets, where it was in due course shovelled into heaps and carried away in wagons to some dumping-place outside the town.<sup>22</sup>

Things in Scotland were certainly no better. In Edinburgh, admittedly, early in the century, Sir John Foulis used to pay "ye muckmen" to clean the entry to his house.<sup>23</sup> Scavengers were employed, too, to clean the main streets early every morning except Sunday;<sup>24</sup> but in reality that meant clearing away the whole of the household refuse from the day before. Ten o'clock at night was the official time for clearing up—"the hour", wrote Edward Burt, "when everybody is at liberty, by beat of the city drum, to throw their filth out at the windows. Then the company began to light pieces of paper and throw them upon the table to smoke the room, and, as I thought, to mix one bad smell with another. Being in my retreat to pass through a long narrow wynde or alley, to go to my new lodgings, a guide was assigned me, who went before me to prevent my disgrace, crying out all the way, with a loud voice, 'Hud your haunde'. The throwing up of a sash, or otherwise opening a window, made me tremble, while behind and before me, at some little distance, fell the terrible shower. . . . When I was in bed I was forced to hide my head between the sheets; for the smell of the filth, thrown out by the neighbours on the back side of the house, came pouring into the room to such a degree, I was almost poisoned with the stench."<sup>25</sup>

Some improvement was made in 1735. Every landlord had then to provide for each house, at his own expense, a vessel sufficient to contain a whole day's refuse; and the scavengers emptied them all every night.<sup>26</sup> But even so, Wesley described the city in 1751 as one of the dirtiest he had ever seen, "not excepting Cologne in Germany".<sup>27</sup> The trouble was that, although it was no longer lawful for people to throw rubbish out of the windows, in practice the magistrates were able to enforce the ruling only so far as the principal streets were concerned. Old customs die

hard, and in the wynds and closes refuse continued to be thrown out at ten o'clock, and, in the words of Smollett, "the maid calls *gardy loo* [*gardez l'eau*] to the passengers, which signifies *Lord have mercy upon you!*"<sup>28</sup>

Right through the century, therefore, Edinburgh citizens were well advised to go on burning their sheets of brown paper to hide worse smells. A complaint was made in the *Scots Magazine* as late as 1796 that the obscure lanes, the most populous parts of the city, were nasty in the extreme, and that the people living in Princes Street suffered from a stagnant marsh at their front doors.<sup>29</sup>

The housewives of Edinburgh were not the only ones with such labour-saving methods of tidying the house. In Perth, too, they emptied their soil-buckets out of the windows; and there they did it at any time of the day that the idea occurred to them, with dire consequences to anybody standing below.<sup>30</sup>

The practice continued in Glasgow long after it had been abandoned in Edinburgh: fifteen women were summoned for the offence as late as 1849. But some of the owners of the new properties were determined to keep them spick and span. About 1760 Bailie John Shortridge, who was a great improver of Argyle Street, made special regulations for his own tenants: they were "not to fix any broads or boxes without the kitchen windows, either for throwing out of water, or any nestiness, or dropping of bottles, the fowl water being to be conveyed from the kitchen, in the said tenement, by a lead pipe; no nestiness or water shall be thrown out at any of the windows, nor shall any carpets or floor-cloaths be shaken or cleaned over any of the fore-windows looking to Argyll Street, but shall be cleaned over the pass-windows, under the penalty of five shillings for each transgression. The dung or fulzie to be made in the tenement is to be carried to the midden-stand belonging to the land, and to be laid down thereon"; but it was then to become the exclusive property of the bailie, who, on his part, "undertakes to keep the midden decent, by carrying away the contents four times each year, or oftener, if needful".<sup>31</sup>

The regulations at least give an excellent idea of what tenants were doing elsewhere. But if they were prevented from throwing their refuse out of the window they had to find some other simple means of getting rid of it. The tenants of one upper flat found an easy solution: they cut holes in the floors and shot the rubbish down into the flat below (whose owner, unfortunately, was not at all taken with the idea).<sup>32</sup>

In the country there was no scavenger making his daily round. Ashes and other refuse were simply thrown on a dunghill conveniently close to the house, at one side of the front door. The pile often rose very high before it was removed to make way for a new one. And usually just in front of the door there was a puddle of liquid refuse, which in due course swelled into a pool known as the "deuk-dub".<sup>33</sup>

In the Highlands, in particular, it was sometimes difficult to persuade the tenants to remove the dunghill from beside the door; but one old lady boasted that she had cheated the laird, as she had "ta'en the midden into the house"! In the village of Stornoway, as a matter of fact, the midden was usually inside the house. So it was in St. Kilda, where the floor was strewn with ashes from the fire, among which fish heads and other refuse accumulated until the depth (and stench, no doubt) made it advisable to remove the heap to a field and so make room for more.<sup>34</sup>

With so much rubbish about, it is not surprising that most parts of Scotland abounded in vermin—rats and mice especially. Sir John Foulis was a frequent purchaser of "mous traps".<sup>35</sup> And in 1793 one of the MacDonalds of the Hebrides had his name in print for having found an effective way of preventing mice from eating cheese and other foodstuffs—by laying in the store-cupboard a few sprigs of mint.<sup>36</sup> There was the same trouble in England. In 1777 the Society of Arts offered a premium for the "most useful bedside mousetrap"; and a Bond Street dealer patented a silver bedside trap and also a nightcap of silver wire "flexible as gauze and yet so strong that not even a rat could gnaw through it".<sup>37</sup>

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Whether or not rats ate nightcaps, they had been known to attack wigs, and in 1703 Sir John Foulis had to pay 11s. 6d. "to the barbour lad for barbarizing and dressing my wig y<sup>e</sup> ratts did eat". They were an intolerable nuisance, according to Edward Burt, who was amazed at the "prodigious numbers" of them to be seen in the morning twilight in all the small Scotch towns.<sup>38</sup> There were, actually, a few districts which were free from them: Rosneath, on the Clyde, for instance, where rats could not exist; <sup>39</sup> Sutherland, except in some coastal places where they had been brought by ships; <sup>40</sup> and Skye, where there were neither rats nor mice, but where the weasel took their place as household pest in chief.<sup>41</sup> But the very fact that those places were singled out for mention shows how badly the rest of the country was infested.

Rats were a real menace. The Isle of Harris was at one time so overrun with them that the whole stocks of corn, milk, butter and cheese in one village were destroyed. The local cats were outnumbered twenty to one, and were powerless to deal with the rats until the islanders began to give them warm milk after every encounter. That renewed their strength and courage, and we are assured that quite soon no rats were left alive.<sup>42</sup> The cats at Duff House, too, had to have their strength built up to fit them for the fray: "Where is all your Cliverness for destroying Rats", wrote Lord Fife to his factor in 1776, "when Sir Wm. Dunbar writes me that there is such a number at my Stables that there must be twelve Cats kept and an allowance of a *Cows* milk and a Peck of Meal per Week for to mentain the Cats".<sup>43</sup>

Susanna, Countess of Eglinton, rather than waste so much milk on cats, evidently preferred to feed the rats themselves. She had vast numbers of them at Auchans. At meal times she used to tap on a panel in the oak wainscot of her dining-room and about a dozen used to come and join her at table, retiring again when she gave a certain signal.<sup>44</sup> They were quite domesticated, and fed out of their own small trough.<sup>45</sup> Her ladyship might even have

enjoyed the experience which befell a certain lady staying in the house of Captain Wedderburn, not far from Edinburgh. That particular visitor was so terrified of rats that she had a light in her bedroom, and after she was in bed she had the white dimity curtains tucked in all round. One night the household was awakened by violent screams: instead of tucking the rats out of bed the maid had tucked one in, and the frightened lady woke up to find it sitting on her pillow.<sup>46</sup>

Many houses were infested with bugs as well. There was a theory that coal fires encouraged them to spread, for it was noticeable that the neighbourhoods which burnt only peat, turf or wood were free from them.<sup>47</sup> London itself had few houses free from the pest.<sup>48</sup> They did considerable damage, as we can see from one of the items of expenditure of William Fraser, Clerk to the Signet, about 1750: "Paid for cleaning the house of certain Vermin by which three beds were entirely lost, £10".<sup>49</sup> The creatures assumed an importance out of all proportion to their size. What professor nowadays, in raptures over his new house, would describe as one of its chief virtues (as Professor Reid did in 1764) that it was "free of bugs"?<sup>50</sup> Or what titled lady would now advertise "an Infallible Mixture for effectually destroying that abominable vermin called the Bugs"? Lady Murray did so, in 1760, in an Edinburgh newspaper; she offered, moreover, to show the "performance of the same". She sold the mixture at seven shillings a Scots pint, but promised to make no charge if it did not work.<sup>51</sup> It is possible that it contained olive oil, recommended in the *Scots Magazine* as a sure destroyer.<sup>52</sup>

For beetles, another fairly common pest, a simple remedy was suggested—to keep a hedgehog in the kitchen.<sup>53</sup> An alternative was to make them drunk by half filling some earthenware bowls with beer and a little coarse sugar and putting them on the floor with a little mound of sand round each to make an easy ascent to the top; the beetles then went down to drink and were unable to return.<sup>54</sup> Such, at least, was the theory.



Lady Murray's interest in bugs makes it less surprising to find an earl with ideas on moth-destruction. The Earl of Cromarty, arranging in 1751 to have his furniture stored, wrote: "I shall send you an infallible receipt for preventing and destroying mothes, viz., black pepper pounded very small and sprink[le]d throw a drudging box pritty thick all over the tapistry and betwixt the folds".<sup>55</sup> He recommended the same procedure for blankets, and probably it was adopted fairly generally, for some years later the spare blankets at the Doune, Rothiemurchus, were always well peppered and sprinkled with bits of tallow candle before being stored away in a heavy chest in the garret.<sup>56</sup>

One pest fairly common in England seems scarcely to have troubled the Scottish housewife—bats. The cellars and kitchen of Twyford House, Hertfordshire, were swarming with them: "they hung down from the rafters in hundreds, and were infinitely more hard to dislodge than the mice in the Highlands".<sup>57</sup> But, as we have seen, Scotland had sufficient vermin of a more dangerous kind to account for the prevalence of disease.

In the more important towns there was little difficulty in securing medical aid. By about 1730 the Scottish medical profession was attracting numerous recruits, and Sir Thomas Moncreiff, for instance, was able to obtain professional advice from at least three of his relations.<sup>58</sup> Now that war had ceased to be the chief business of the sons of gentlemen, many of them turned to doctoring or law, if they were intellectually bent, or else to foreign trade. So many young men went to Leyden, Paris and other continental cities to study medicine that the profession became overcrowded, and many qualified doctors were unable to practise.<sup>59</sup> Besides those who had studied abroad there were also a number of surgeon-apothecaries, men who had worked their way up by apprenticeship to a surgeon, and were capable of giving rough and ready help as general practitioners. From the late 'twenties, when Edinburgh University opened its medical school (followed by the middle of the century by the University of Glasgow), the quality of medical

education in Scotland fell little short of the training on the Continent; and in 1765 a visiting doctor from Philadelphia was struck to find that medicine in Paris was no longer comparable with Edinburgh practice.<sup>60</sup> Scottish medical graduates were then winning considerable renown in England, following the outstanding success there of the brothers William and John Hunter.

The number of doctors was impressive, but for various reasons their distribution throughout the land was uneven. Although by the end of the century Scotland had altogether about 2300 doctors, in the more remote parts there was only one for 3500 or more widely scattered people.<sup>61</sup> What that might mean in an emergency can be realised from a typical case: until well after 1760 the Farquharsons, a noted Aberdeenshire family, had no doctor within thirty-five miles of their mansion-house of Invercauld.<sup>62</sup> The state of affairs on the Isle of Mull was worse: there was no medical help at all on the island; the nearest was at Inverary, and for an invalid the rough crossing was quite impossible. Very few patients could pay a doctor's expenses for the journey, and even if he could afford to waive the fee he could seldom spare the time. The best that could be done was for a relation or friend of the sick person to make the journey and describe the symptoms; and, provided he did not let his imagination run away with him too far, there was just a chance that the doctor would recognise the malady and be able to dispense a cure for it.<sup>63</sup>

The pure, tonic air of the Highlands was cure enough for chest complaints and other winter ailments. Consequently, in the ordinary way there was little for a doctor to do there.<sup>64</sup> One Renfrew parish, too, went for long periods without a resident physician: there were not enough cases to make the practice worth while.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, by 1790 the town of Jedburgh had three surgeons and three physicians for its 3000 people, possibly not so much for the greater amount of illness there as from a desire for companionship. It was about that time, we remember, that Colonel Thornton stopped for a night at an inn near Dunkeld, and was

surprised when the landlord apologised to him because a surgeons' meeting was in progress in another room. They had met to discuss a very particular case, he explained, and there might be some little disturbance. And very particular it turned out to be; the Colonel was kept awake half the night by "the noisy mirth of this scientific body".<sup>66</sup>

When the doctors held their consultation at a patient's bedside it was liable to be an expensive meeting. The physician used himself to carry in his pocket the big sand-glass with which to count the patient's pulse, but he was also attended by his man, who carried the inevitable leeches, helped to bleed the patient and in general acted as a kind of nurse-attendant. So when in 1704 Sir John Foulis had an attack of jaundice and "collicks" which even an extra large dose of "ipsum salt" did not cure, so that his own doctor thought it wise to call in two advisers, he had six men gathered round him at once, all, no doubt, looking portentously wise. The three doctors each cost him £14: 4s. Scots a visit, and each of their men £6, and they came three times. Sir John probably obtained far more solace from Katharine, his nurse, who looked after him for four months at £2 Scots a week.<sup>67</sup>

The charges, apparently, were already based on the patient's social position. Whereas Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk paid his doctor £25 Scots a visit when the children had "small pocks", in 1719,<sup>68</sup> and Sir Thomas Moncreiff in 1724 had to pay his Edinburgh physician from two to five guineas a time, according to the distance he had to travel,<sup>69</sup> while Laurence Oliphant of Gask managed to run up a bill of £1185 Scots (not far short of £100 sterling),<sup>70</sup> a Renfrew "practiser of chyme and medicine" sent James Gibb of Barlogan an account for only £3 Scots (5s. sterling), "pairtly for ane cordial to his daughter and pairtly for my pains in going to his house with it to see his daughter, being two miles of way distant from my house". He charged other patients at the same comparatively low rate, but even so, he had to bring a summons against six of them, in 1721, before they would pay his fees.<sup>71</sup>

Doctors' bills could already be a serious drain on the family income. For the middle class they probably worked out at about the same as in England, where they were estimated in 1729 to average £5 sterling a year for each family.<sup>72</sup> The one country in Europe, it seems, where medical attendance was really cheap was Holland. Physicians there visited their patients daily, or twice a day if they were seriously ill, and charged only the equivalent of 6d. a visit.<sup>73</sup> Such a system might pay where the doctor could see a large number of patients in a short time. It would have been out of the question in Scottish country districts, with roads as they were.

Where there was no doctor the villagers turned hopefully to the laird or the minister, or sometimes the schoolmaster, for help and advice. It was not simply a question of giving first aid ; it was often the only aid forthcoming. A landlord here and there, as on the Isle of Arran, might pay a surgeon to visit the people every spring and autumn,<sup>74</sup> but ailments and accidents are not so easy to regulate. For the sake of their prestige, therefore, if not from a genuine desire to help, lairds and clergy and other men of learning dabbled in medicine ; and it was seriously suggested that every student of divinity should devote some time to studying surgery or physic.<sup>75</sup> Skill in blood-letting and a sound knowledge of Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* <sup>76</sup> were all that were needed to give a man a reputation as a healer. Some went beyond that, and took active steps, by inoculating the whole of the local population, to prevent the spread of smallpox, the dread disease of the countryside.<sup>77</sup> Incidentally, it is doubtful whether any fugitive ever spent a year in hiding more profitably than did Charles Boyd, brother of the Earl of Errol : during his enforced stay in Arran he came across a whole chest of medical books. He read them to such good purpose that when Boswell visited the Earl at Slains Castle in 1773 he found Boyd established there as a regular consultant, with patients waiting their turn to see him.<sup>78</sup>

Much of the success of some of the amateur physicians was due to their wives. The Welsh lady of the manor might

be famous for her home-made brew of herbs,<sup>79</sup> but the Scottish housewife, too, would be ready to supply the various concoctions recommended by her husband. She might go further, and prescribe medicines herself. Both Mrs. William Forsyth, wife of a Cromarty merchant, and later on Mrs. Donald Ross of Ross-shire were specially noted for their work with the sick; they not only advised as to treatment and dispensed medicines, but they provided the feminine touch as well, acting as nurse when required and providing tempting food from their own kitchens.<sup>80</sup> Another who practised medicine was Anne Macra of Beaulieu. Together with the instructions for taking her "universal physic" she gave sensible advice on rising early, taking plenty of exercise and keeping to a light diet.<sup>81</sup>

There was no shortage, as a rule, of would-be nurses. Brothers and sisters, brothers- and sisters-in-law and even distant relations would leave their homes for days at a time in order to look after an invalid.<sup>82</sup> In fact, there was little danger of dying of neglect, but a real risk of being killed by kindness. The patient who wanted nothing so much as a quiet nap had a remote chance of getting it; as soon as word got round that he was ill, friends from near and far would crowd into his room and stand round his bed, taking anxious glances at him, feeling his pulse and sadly shaking their heads. Even though it was a case of smallpox, mothers would turn up with children in their arms and take their turn at the bedside;<sup>83</sup> and a minister of religion was led to declare that the spread of fevers was due not only to overcrowding and lack of ventilation but also to "an over anxiety for constant prayers over the diseased".<sup>84</sup> The risk of infection scarcely troubled anybody—witness this extract from one of Lord Lovat's letters to his agent in Edinburgh: "My house has been all the week full of company as well as the last and my child's lying in the small pox makes me unfit to answer such a letter of business as yours".<sup>85</sup> The very survival of the letter shows that the agent worried no more about it than did the company who went on staying in the house.

Some of the amateur doctors gave sound advice, and in consequence attracted large numbers of ailing people to their houses. Among them was the Rev. George Ridpath of Roxburghshire. His parishioners flocked to him for treatment, and he was genuinely pleased when a patient returned to thank him for a successful potion, whether it was "an electuary made up of Conserva Roses and rhubarb"<sup>86</sup> or something with a less attractive name and a horrible flavour. He treated his own ailments quite sensibly, too, in the ordinary way: if he had a cold, for instance, he would bathe his feet in warm water and drink a quart of warm whey before going to bed, and so get a good night's rest.<sup>87</sup> But at another time he would run appalling risks. One exploit of his, in 1759, reads as anything but the act of a sober clergyman. He had heard a rumour that there was a mineral well in a near-by meadow. He accordingly went to investigate, and found it a scanty spring almost overgrown with meadow grass. It had a blue scum on it, "a sensible astringency to the taste", and smelt of gunpowder; and a mixture of plantain juice and chalk had turned it a nasty dark colour. But instead of deciding that it was not for him, as most men would have done, he drank more than a quart of it. As it happened he found it "easy on the stomach",<sup>88</sup> and exceedingly lucky he was that he did.

One of the most successful of the untrained physicians was Neil Beaton, of Skye, who won great fame at the end of the seventeenth century. Although he was illiterate, he had a wonderful knack of judging the medicinal qualities of plants. By tasting a root or noting the colour of a flower he knew instinctively the type of ailment it would cure. He had his own method of extracting the juice. Moreover, what was particularly rare in those days, he considered his patient's constitution before he dosed him.<sup>89</sup>

Some of the natural remedies recommended by Beaton and other country people were not unpleasant. In coastal districts great use was made of seaweed, applied to the forehead to induce sleep or eaten boiled to cure internal

complaints.<sup>90</sup> There were other ways of giving sleep, such as washing the patient's legs and feet in warm water containing chickweed, or dabbing on his forehead a mixture of chopped nettles and raw white of egg. White of egg mixed with fern leaves was held to cure eye troubles. And for more general aches and pains the value of heat was well known: many a toothache was relieved by holding a wad of hot green turf to the cheek;<sup>91</sup> and the Rev. John Mill of Shetland was probably not the only sufferer from sciatica who got rid of his pain by lying in a bath of hot earth.<sup>92</sup>

In due course the *Scots Magazine* began to give practical hints and recipes for medicines of various kinds. The instructions were usually simple and able to be carried out in the ordinary home. To take two prescriptions at random: the remedy advised for a sore throat was to suck a small piece of alum shortly before going to bed.<sup>93</sup> For epilepsy the advice was to make an electuary from powdered Peruvian bark and valerian root, "with syrup of orange-peel as suffices", and to take the "bigness of a nutmeg" night and morning for three months, and thereafter for three or four days before the new and full moon.<sup>94</sup>

The eighteenth-century Scot was apt to put a good deal of his trust in wine and spirits. One is only surprised to find that now and then he allowed them to be polluted with some nasty tincture or some concoction of herbs. When he drank his half pint of strong white ale, piping hot, to ease a pain in his stomach, he seems to have accepted meekly the half-handful of dried tansy that was boiled in it for his good.<sup>95</sup> And he cheerfully agreed, no doubt, to take his half glass of linseed oil (a highly esteemed remedy for many ills) for the sake of the whisky in the rest of the glass.<sup>96</sup> But from the point of view of treatment scarlet fever may well have been the favourite illness: the standard cure was brandy in occasional doses, and if the patient was an infant it was recommended that his nurse should drink it for him.<sup>97</sup>

To the Highlanders in particular, whisky was the great universal cure. They "administer it", said a wondering traveller, "in colds, fevers, and faintings, and it is a frequent

prayer of theirs, that 'God may keep them from that disorder that whiskey will not cure' ".<sup>98</sup> The faith in it led at times to over-dosing, so that a remedy had to be found for the cure. It took the form of a holiday in the country on the pretext of drinking goat whey. There were various places which were spoken of as "goat-whey quarters", and whole families used to go there for what we should now regard as summer holidays. The Oliphants of Gask used to go regularly to Callander,<sup>99</sup> whereas Lord Arniston preferred more of a change, and drank his whey sometimes in Struan, sometimes in Rossdhu, and now and then in Castle Leod, Luss and other places.<sup>100</sup> Goats' milk was the popular health-drink, but asses' came a close second. That was the choice of Lady Strathnaver in 1720, when her husband was seriously ill. She wrote to her agent asking him to buy an ass and send it to her; and, said she, "let the bearer have also directions how to travel north with the ass, that her milk may not dry up as the last did that came north". As an after-thought, the thrifty soul suggested that if he could *borrow* an ass it would be better still.<sup>101</sup>

The goat-whey and ass-milk fashion declined during the second half of the century. By the 'nineties it was more usual to go to a watering-place to take the cure, probably for the sake of the gay society gathered there.<sup>102</sup>

When a doctor was called in, the patient was seldom given such pleasant drinks. The physician had a mystery to keep up, and based it, as often as not, on the *Edinburgh Pharmacopoeia*. The third edition, published in 1737, still gave him suggestions on the use of snake-skin, wood-lice, horse-dung, mother-of-pearl, pigeons' blood, spiders' webs and other revolting items for use in his nauseating compounds. A "Chyrurgeon Apothecarie" of Inverness admittedly had more attractive ideas: between 1712 and 1714 he supplied the wife of the young Laird of Kilravock with drugs including tussilago flowers, maidenhair, St.-John's-wort, pennyroyal and white lily root; but the poor lady died without waiting for further experiments.<sup>103</sup>

Some families used a remarkable quantity of ointment as



well as of medicine. Some of it, most likely, was for the itch, which was one of the commonest complaints of the time, particularly in the Highlands, though the children of the well-to-do suffered from it as badly as any.<sup>104</sup> What compound was used as the cure is difficult to say, for there were so many jars in the family medicine chest (or its equivalent). Between 1743 and 1746, for instance, Viscount Strathallan's household was supplied by the family surgeon with pots of "Cataplast", "Egyptiack oyntment", "Basilicon" and "Venice Tryacle", all for external application. The actual medicines delivered for various members of the family might have been worse: "spirit of wine and oyle of turpentine" and "Aethiop's mineral" are perhaps a little doubtful, but there were also bottles of syrup of poppies, honey of roses, and barley cinnamon water, and, best of all, a bottle of "holy tincture for the family". One can only guess at the domestic upset which called for a box of "hysterick pils" for one of the maids.<sup>105</sup>

If the holy tincture was the same as the "sacred" tincture, which seems likely, it was easy to make at home. Here is the recipe: "Put in a Mutchkin Bottle five Pennyworth of Hiera Picra, one of Cochineal pounded; then fill the Bottle with Half Lisbon Wine, and Half Brandy, tye a Bit of clean Cloth on the Bottle, and put it in a Pan of cold Water, so full that it won't go into the Bottle; put it on a very slow Fire, and don't let it boil but simmer; then take off the Pan, and let the Bottle stand till the Water is cold: It is a very safe gentle Physick, and good for a Cholicke".<sup>106</sup>

Not every doctor made a parade of his medicines. The Laird of Thunderton may have felt, indeed, that his daughter Betty was being neglected when, in 1713, Dr. Robert Innes of Elgin sent her nothing but "seven small gilded pills in a little box", with instructions that she was to wash down five of them with a mouthful of cold ale. The doctor himself may well have put more trust in the second part of his prescription, that she was to observe a "physical diet", keeping warm and dining on fresh broth, and drinking

warm table ale when she was thirsty.<sup>107</sup> It was a homely sort of cure, on a par with Miss M'Leod's treatment of Dr. Johnson at Dunvegan when he was miserable with a cold : she persuaded him to put on a large flannel night-cap when he went to bed (a thing he had never worn before) and to drink some brandy before going to sleep.<sup>108</sup>

A man such as Dr. Johnson might be easy to convince that simple disorders could be cured without physic, but the mass of the people put great faith in it. Not many of them, perhaps, went to the lengths of Bailie John Steuart's brother-in-law, who worried his doctors by drinking enough medicine for six men,<sup>109</sup> but most people seem to have kept a supply of their favourite tinctures ready for an emergency. By the end of the century nearly all the patent medicines on sale in London could be bought in various parts of Scotland : Godbold's Vegetable Balsam, Daffy's Elixir, Cornwell's Oriental Vegetable Cordial, Dr. Brodum's Botanical Syrup, and many more. But they could never quite take the place of the old, traditional remedies, such as Scarborough water ("good for all diseases whatsoever except consumption",<sup>110</sup> which Lady Grisell Baillie bought by the load and Sir John Foulis twenty bottles at a time), tincture of rhubarb, and tar-water.

The enormous quantities of tar-water which the ordinary housewife prepared at a time show the faith she had in it. The standard recipe was to put a pound and a quarter of tar into a large earthen vessel and pour on it nine pints of pump water (and we have to remember that a Scots pint equalled about three English ones); it was to be stirred with a wooden ladle and left to stand for a day; then it was ready to strain and bottle up. "It may be taken once or twice a-day", we are told encouragingly, "a Quarter of a Pint, or more at a Dose; and it is excellent against many Disorders, the Rheumatism, the small Pox, and many others." <sup>111</sup>

Not unnaturally, considering how cut off some parts of Scotland were from the rest, the same complaint might be treated differently from one district to another. Jaundice,

for example, was cured by the women of the Island of Unst (Shetland) with a powder made from whelks and their shells dried together.<sup>112</sup> The western islanders had a more direct method: they treated it "by laying the patient on his face, and pretending to look upon his back-bones, they presently pour a pail-full of cold water on his bare back; and this proves successful".<sup>113</sup> There is no doubt that he would promptly *say* he was better, for fear they should do it again. It was as rough as the treatment which was said to have cured convulsions in Orkney for good and all. It had been a common complaint, especially during kirk-time, until a kirk-officer "tossed a woman in that state, with whom he was often plagued, into a ditch full of water. She was never known to have it afterward; and others dreaded the like treatment."<sup>114</sup>

They seem to have gone in for these forthright methods a good deal in the west, at least at the beginning of the century. The way of treating "faintness of the spirits" in the parish of Kilmartin was definitely a "kill or cure" method. It was carried on by the local smith, an acknowledged adept, as follows: "The patient being laid on the anvil with his face uppermost, the smith takes a big hammer in both his hands, and making his face all grimace, he approaches his patient; and then drawing his hammer from the ground, as if he designed to hit him with his full strength on the forehead, he ends in a feint, else he would be sure to cure the patient of all diseases; but the smith being accustomed to the performance, has a dexterity of managing his hammer with discretion; though at the same time he must do it so as to strike terror in the patient; and this, they say, has always the designed effect".<sup>115</sup>

Such treatment savours rather of devil-doctoring. It is not surprising that it should, for a number of estimable Scots were on quite familiar terms with the Devil, or genuinely thought that they were. Superstition was rife, especially as regards illness. It was fortunate, in the circumstances, that people pinned their faith to "cures" which were usually quite harmless. Some chanted invocations,<sup>116</sup> or

fanned the invalid's face with the leaves of the Bible.<sup>117</sup> Others relied on charms, such as arrowhead flints or glass beads, which they dipped in water, giving the patient the water to drink. Another cure which at least did no harm was the "touch" treatment of Macdonald's disease (a form of consumption): certain clans of Macdonalds were believed to be able to cure it by the magic of their touch and the use of certain words—hence its name.<sup>118</sup> All of these forms of treatment were safe, though the results might be disappointing. But it was not always so. There was a case in the 'seventies, for example, of a man in Tweeddale who suffered from indigestion. One of his friends suggested that he would gain relief by swallowing stones, which he straightway proceeded to do. For the next sixteen years he was afflicted with violent stomach pains. Then, in a specially bad attack, he vomited and threw up thirteen stones, "which", according to the local minister, "being the Devil's dozen, might probably be the number swallowed".<sup>119</sup>

It was quite difficult in practice to sort out the superstitions from the more scientific prescriptions. Thus, among the sensible advice given in John Moncrieff's *Poor Man's Physician* (the trusted guide of many a household during the first half of the century) was a singularly doubtful remedy for a whitlow on the finger: the patient was recommended to stop the finger into a cat's ear, whereupon it would be well in half an hour. Before dismissing this with a superior smile it will do no harm to read what an English clergyman did in 1791 when he had a sty on his eyelid: "As it is commonly said", he wrote in his diary, "that the Eye-lid being rubbed by the tail of a black Cat would do it much good if not entirely cure it, and having a black Cat, a little before dinner I made a trial of it, and very soon after dinner I found my Eye-lid much abated of the swelling and almost free from Pain. I cannot therefore but conclude it to be of the greatest service to a Stiony on the Eye-lid. Any other Cats Tail may have the above effect in all probability—but I did my Eye-lid with my own black Tom Cat's Tail." <sup>120</sup>

## HEALTH AND SANITATION

Mixed in with all this childish simplicity there was a good deal of common sense. It showed itself in the Angus treatment of St. Vitus's dance, picturesquely described in those days as "the leaping ague". The policy was to give the victim plenty of room. The disease apparently took a livelier form than it does nowadays, giving the sufferer fits of dancing or running about. When the attack came on, therefore, everybody cleared out of the way and let him work off his energy until he was exhausted. Then he was able to rest, and the remainder of the household, too.<sup>121</sup>

One of those who showed particular kindness to invalids was Sir Hugh Campbell of Cawdor. He sent a pressing invitation once, through his nephew, to his friend Billy Moy to come and stay with him to recuperate after an illness. After promising to feed him on jelly and broth and sack posset and other nourishing things, he added: "I would spaire nothing to doe him good, for he is very dear to me, and he would recover his strength the sooner that he laid bussines asyde for a little while and divert himself with my books".<sup>122</sup> His "diverting" books, it is interesting to note, consisted of *Jacobi Arminii Opera*, *Bentivoglio's Relation of Flanders*, *The Spirit of Bondage*, *Alix Preparation for the Lord's Supper*, *Gouge's Call to Sinners*, *Mortification and Sincerity by Low*, *Watson's Divine Cordial*, *Dickson on the Hebrews*, *Burges' Doctrine of Original Sin* and others of the same kind.<sup>123</sup>

It would be pleasant to be able to record that all these various treatments were successful. Unfortunately, that was far from being so. Adam Smith tells us, on good authority, that in the Highlands it was not uncommon for a woman who had borne twenty children not to have two alive. In some places half the children died before they were four years old; elsewhere half died before they were ten. That was specially true, of course, of the poor.<sup>124</sup> Edinburgh itself was none too healthy: it has been estimated that the mortality in the 'forties was 34 per 1000.<sup>125</sup> Of the total of 1123 deaths there in 1760, according to the general bill of mortality, old age accounted for 274, consumption 256, fever 157, measles 37 and smallpox 66.<sup>126</sup> Two years later

274 died from smallpox.<sup>127</sup> For 1780 the total burials were given as only 753, of which 96 were due to old age, 184 to consumption, 108 to fever and 101 to smallpox; but it was explained that many Edinburgh people were now being buried outside the city.<sup>128</sup> We are told, in any case, by a Scottish contemporary writer that any vital statistics for Edinburgh during this period must be quite inaccurate. They could be obtained only from the registers of births and of burials. Neither clergy nor parents bothered over-much about recording births, so the lists could be by no means complete. As to deaths, "the register of burials", says our informant, "is kept by people whose faculties are impaired by drinking, who forget to day what was done yesterday"; and it did not include notices of unbaptised persons, or of anybody whose relations could not pay for the use of a mortcloth.<sup>129</sup> Exact statistics need not concern us; we know enough to realise that the care of the sick was by no means the least worrying of the housewife's tasks.

## Chapter XI

### Leisure Hours at Home

The typical Scot of the early eighteenth century tended to take his pleasures rather sedately. The Kirk, which played a considerable part in his life, would countenance little in the way of frivolity; and to strict Presbyterians it was no hardship to have to conform to the rulings of ministers and elders. In one Elgin parish even as late as 1790 the only indulgence which the inhabitants allowed themselves was to meet occasionally, in parties of fifteen to twenty-five, to discuss some abstruse point of Calvinism, which they did with great eloquence and enthusiasm. To have any other form of entertainment even at a wedding would have seemed to them a sin.<sup>1</sup> But they were exceptionally solemn folk. People elsewhere did allow themselves some worldly enjoyment. That was especially so after 1760, when the power of the Kirk was beginning to wane, and when rising prosperity brought with it more opportunities for relaxation.

Opportunities for fun varied, obviously, between one district and another. In Edinburgh and Inverness and other towns there were well-patronised routs and assemblies, as well as gay oyster-suppers and similar social events. But in country districts life was apt to be drab, particularly for anybody who was not keen on hunting or fishing or the games of curling or golf. Such a one might well be in the same quandary as Stevenson's Lothian ploughman: "Half-dressed, he daunders out an' in, Perplext wi' leisure".<sup>2</sup> There was good reason to cultivate some hobby or other pleasant pastime.

Some people, of course, could always find something interesting to do. One who comes to mind was the Rev. George Ridpath, the Roxburghshire minister whom we have met already. In between caring for the health and morals of his parishioners he would amuse himself quite happily in and about the house, gardening, playing chess or whist (although he admitted that he was a mere novice), cutting out paper "likenesses", or silhouettes, or simply re-cocking his hat. And one afternoon in 1757 he had a most enjoyable time looking through a telescope at people coming home from a fair, thrilled to find that he could recognise them a mile off. His tastes, for the most part, seem childishly simple. But in the evenings he conscientiously read Latin classics, medical works, magazines, newspapers, or anything that came his way. At least, he set out to read them, but with what success may be imagined from some of the entries in his diary: "Slept on Epictetus"; "Slept on Terence"; "P.m. dozed and read miscellaneously".<sup>3</sup>

The contents of the typical private library, to judge from such catalogues as are known to us, consisted in the main of theological and classical works, with perhaps a few volumes on law. Not many of them included such items as the four plays which Sir John Lauder bought for himself early in the century: *Love in a Nunnery*, *Marriage à la Mode*, *Epsom Wells* and *Macbeth*.<sup>4</sup> The "Inventar of the Lady Calder her books", taken in 1705, did mention a *Book of Palmestry* (it was a superstitious age), but for the rest it was a very sober list: *Alain's Godly Fear*, *Alain's Vindiciae Pietatis*, *Answer to the Clergie's Contempt*, *Abercromby's Art of Divine Converse*, *Gray's Spiritual Warfare*, *Guthrie's Christians Great Interest*, *Sutton's Meditation on the Sacrament*; and more of the same nature.<sup>5</sup> Another list, that of a fictitious old lady, printed later in the century, may well have been typical; it consisted of several volumes of sermons, a Concordance to the Bible, and various devotional works, and also included the *Spectator*, Cowley's *Poems*, Dryden's *Works*, Lamb's *Royal Cookery* and Nisbet's



*Heraldry*.<sup>6</sup> One famous work which found its way into many a home was *Satan's Invisible World Discovered . . . proving . . . that there are Devils, Spirits, Witches, and Apparitions*. To its shuddering readers it seemed to ring too true.<sup>7</sup> But ideas on recreational reading have changed since the eighteenth century: in 1763 David Hume's elder nephew, Joseph, was said to be spending his evenings in Edinburgh "in getting his school tasks, or in reading amusing books,—such as his uncle's history"! <sup>8</sup>

Some of the private collections were of a considerable size. George Baillie, for instance, had four cartloads of books to take with him when he moved from Edinburgh to Mellerstain.<sup>9</sup> The young Laird of Kilravock, another collector, had books sent to him frequently from Edinburgh and London, and between 1726 and 1728 added more than four hundred to his library.<sup>10</sup> It was an expensive hobby in those days before cheap editions. "'Tis as bad as pictures", Lord President Dundas warned his son.<sup>11</sup> But the collections, when formed, were not kept purely for show. Before the circulating libraries spread to the country towns, which was not until late in the century, the laird would often lend his books without question to friends far and near. The Sinclairs of Mey, in Caithness, were particularly generous with their books at Barrogill Castle: we find one friend, who lived twenty miles away, returning Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; another returns copies of Horace, Terence, Sallust and Caesar; a clergyman returns two volumes of Rollin's *History* and asks for two or three more volumes of the same work; somebody else wants to borrow Rapin's *History*.<sup>12</sup> It is to be hoped that the Sinclairs never came to regret their action. The experiences of James, second Lord Fife, rather make one wonder whether they did. Not only did people take undue liberties with his books when he was away, but they also stood on his chairs in order to reach the top shelves more easily, "which", he complained, "will quite destroy them". He wrote to his factor in 1777, therefore, telling him to gather all the chairs into the middle of the room and to get some kind of a

step-ladder ; he would send proper library steps from London as soon as he could.<sup>13</sup>

The zeal for reading was not always easy to satisfy, but from about 1765 onwards groups of neighbours in all parts of the country began to form libraries of their own.<sup>14</sup> In a Nithsdale parish, for instance, a society was formed for the purpose, with a legal contract for three years. The members paid an entrance fee of 5s. and a subscription of 6d. a month, to be spent on books. They chose books in rotation, and after three years the volumes were sold among the members by auction. In some districts the subscriptions were higher and the choice of reading correspondingly better.

Residents in Edinburgh were able to get newspapers as well as books. Two of the papers in circulation before 1710 were the *Edinburgh Courant*, published every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, and the *Scots Postman*, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Later on there appeared the *Caledonian Mercury* and the *Edinburgh Advertiser*. Glasgow, too, had a number of short-lived newspapers before 1741, when the *Glasgow Journal* was founded, and later in the century there were periodicals of various kinds in Dundee, Dumfries, Kelso and other places.<sup>15</sup> To have a newspaper delivered in an out-of-the-way district such as Moray, round about the year 1700, seems to have demanded a special agreement with the Postmaster General, as follows : "I, Alex. Smith, post-master generall of this kingdom, doe hereby oblige myselfe to send to Mr. Archibald Dunbarr of Thundertown ane Flying Post, and Edinburgh Gazette, twice a week from the date hereof untill Candlemass one thousand seven hundreth and one years. . . ." <sup>16</sup> The papers were out of date by the time they reached the north (as the London ones were when they arrived in Edinburgh), and in 1732 Lord Lovat cancelled his order for the *Edinburgh Courant* because he was receiving so many newspapers from London.<sup>17</sup> Important news was likely to reach the far north as quickly in a London newspaper as if it were carried to Edinburgh by courier and printed there.

The publication of the *Scots Magazine*, from 1739 onwards,

gave people of leisure something a little lighter to read (although some of them were already receiving the *Gentleman's Magazine* or the *London Magazine* a week or so late). And as the century wore on, and the bigger towns came to have their circulating libraries, "light summer reading" <sup>18</sup> in the shape of three-volume novels created a demand of its own, in spite of the stern denunciations of moralists. There was ample material for reading aloud, one of the favourite pastimes for long evenings.<sup>19</sup>

For real content many a man wants not only books but tobacco. The Scots were heavy smokers, so heavy that the minister of Peterculter, in Aberdeen, became greatly concerned as to the consequences, and tried to persuade his flock to smoke camomile flowers as a substitute, thinking them less harmful than tobacco.<sup>20</sup> (Men did at least refrain from smoking tobacco in the kirk—they chewed it instead.<sup>21</sup>) Between pipes people took snuff. It was rather expensive—Lady Grisell Baillie once paid £1 sterling for four bottles of it—but the fashionable way of using a snuff-box was most delicate and economical: the correct method was to take out a very small quantity with a little spoon the size of a tooth-pick, or to use a quill.<sup>22</sup>

According to the parish ministers, who seem to have disapproved of many of the pleasures of their congregations, women smoked to even greater excess than the men. "There is scarce a young woman," complained one of them, "by the time she has been taught to spin, but has also learnt to smoke."<sup>23</sup> A small village shop in Argyll was then selling tobacco and snuff to the value of £60 sterling a year, and more besides was obtained from hawkers. The minister of the parish decided that the men might do as they wished; "but far be it from the fair and respectable females of this vale", he wrote, "to disfigure their features, and to destroy their powers of long and sweet cadence, by a habit so repugnant to every thing engaging and cleanly in woman."<sup>24</sup> The Rev. George Ridpath took the matter more placidly, and when one of his lady parishioners came to him in 1758 in great distress because she had

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used an I.O.U. of his to light her pipe, he wrote her another without any rebuke.<sup>25</sup> He had probably been used even in childhood to seeing women smoke. The habit was not confined to any one part of Scotland, or, for that matter, to Scotland alone: a Continental visitor to England early in the century was amazed to find how heavily English women smoked, especially in the western counties.<sup>26</sup>

Country women, on the whole, had a dreary existence. Most of them had spinning and knitting and plain needlework enough to fill the whole of their leisure time. Maybe they were happier so, for the alternative seems to have been inexpressibly dull. Take, for instance, three typical days in the life of Elizabeth Rose of Kilravock in the year 1771, when she was twenty-four: "*Monday, October 30.*—Read a chapter of the Bible, 2 psalms, 2 chapters of S. Augustin, one of the 'Whole Duty of Man'. Began a letter to Peggy (Russell). *Forenoon*; Painted a flower very neatly; took an airing with Mamma. *Afternoon*; Copied a long prayer of Hervey's for Peggy. *Evening*; copied three chapters of H. Mackenzie's new performance. *Tuesday 31st.*—*Morning*; Read as I did the preceding day. *Forenoon*; Painted a flower. Wrote to H. Mac. *Evening*; Received letters. Ended one to Peggy. Wrote to Miss Brodie. A line to Dr. Forbes. A memorandum to Inverness. . . . *Wednesday, 15th November.*—*Morning*; Received a letter from Balfour; answered it and wrote to Miss Brodie. Read a chapter and a psalm. *Forenoon*; Copied almost two chapters of 'The Man of Feeling'. Walked round the garden. Wrought catgut till dinner. A visit of my nurse. Played a single game of whist. 5 trios before supper with Papa and Hughie."<sup>27</sup>

Apparently Miss Rose expected no more from life, and was fairly content. By the time they had been "finished", upper class girls in Scotland as well as in England and on the Continent usually accepted the idea that their ambitions must be cut down to painting on glass, making wax flowers and fruits, japanning on wood, and similar trifles.<sup>28</sup> Parents seemed satisfied that it should be so; but when Sir John Sinclair was in Paris in 1786, and saw some of the frivolous

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oddments which Madame Genlis had made in the intervals of writing, he was astonished that so distinguished an authoress should find time to make "such inferior objects" so well.<sup>29</sup> Girls who were not so deft, and did not make them at all well, and those who saw them as the "inferior objects" they were, were apt to sigh for pastimes more worth while. It is easy to understand the bitterness of Lady Elizabeth Lindsay's reply to her brother, the Earl of Balcarres, when he wrote from abroad full of praise for the singing of certain nuns: "The nuns, I fancy," she wrote, "live better and are merrier than I have been for most part of my life".<sup>30</sup>

The trouble, as with a great many of the Scottish troubles of the eighteenth century, was due very largely to the bad state of communications. What people wanted was cheerful society. The Kirk was not against it; visiting could be regarded as a Christian duty. Boswell, on his "jaunt" in 1762, spent several happy evenings joining in singing, lively conversation, reading aloud, card-playing and dancing.<sup>31</sup> But in the more remote parts of the country, for five or six months in the year, social intercourse was almost impossible. Where there were neighbours near by, and the women could take their distaffs and meet in one another's houses for an evening's "rocking" <sup>32</sup> while the men gathered round the fire and retailed local gossip, time would pass pleasantly enough. But so-called "neighbours" were not always so close at hand. In the Highlands and islands, indeed, "neighbourhood" was said to extend "from Barra to Stornoway, to Sky, Rasay, Coll, nay, to Inverness". In spite of the distances, everybody knew of all the births (whether of calves or children) and of all the business dealings and all the tea-parties for a hundred miles around—or so it was said.<sup>33</sup> But that was not the same thing as being able to drop in on a neighbour at any time. When a slip of the tongue, causing a Highland traveller to stop at the first house on the right instead of the first on the left, could send him fifteen miles out of his way,<sup>34</sup> casual visiting was liable to be difficult.

If there was a tavern within easy reach, the housewife was likely to be left a great deal to her own resources. There were frequent business meetings, "hoy jinks" (convivial gatherings of lawyers) and other pretexts to take her husband out for an evening's heavy drinking.<sup>35</sup> All the more welcome, therefore, was any visitor who could call in and relieve the monotony.

It must be admitted that some of the more formal gatherings were dull in the extreme. Mary Fairfax, as a young girl in Burntisland, was often invited to accompany her mother to tea-parties given by the local widows and maiden ladies, and was thoroughly bored at having to stay on late in the evening to play cards.<sup>36</sup> (Tea-parties were comparatively new affairs: in Cromarty, one district where they were fashionable after about 1750, they might not have been known until much later if a local merchant had not taken the risk of importing eight tea-kettles from Holland.<sup>37</sup>) Dinner-parties, as we have seen, might be more formidable still. And even the longer formal visits, with their greater opportunities for enjoyment, were strictly bounded by etiquette. By the rules of society they were of a standard length: "a rest day, a drest day, and a prest day". On the first day the guest was expected to rest after the fatigues of the journey, whether there had been a journey or not. On the second day the company wore their best full-dress, perhaps made specially for the visit. Then, on the third day, it was understood that the guest should make as if to leave, the host should press him to stay one more night, and, after the correct amount of hesitation, the guest should accept.<sup>38</sup>

There were a good many points of behaviour to bear in mind on formal visits. If the guest was a person of quality the host would meet him at his coach, take him to the best room and offer him the best seat; then he himself might sit down, with proper humility, on a chair without arms and at a respectful distance. The guest, for his part, would never enter the house wearing a cloak or a big coat or boots, but he would be sure to wear gloves. It was rude for a lady

to go in wearing a scarf or a plaid, or with her gown tucked up. Her curtesy, as she entered, had to be slow enough to allow the company to return it, but not so slow as to weary them (she had been taught the correct timing, no doubt, in her early lessons with her dancing-master). Above all, the really polite guest as far as possible avoided yawning or spitting. "When you spit," he was advised, "do it in your Handkerchief and not in the Room."<sup>39</sup>

What with one thing and another, formal visits were rather worrying. The ones who enjoyed them most, possibly, were the families of the rising Glasgow merchants, who were as proud as could be of their powdered flunkies and all the other attributes of their new wealth. But that was not until quite late in the century. Earlier on, people preferred to invite their friends to simple, unpretentious meals. The usual form of invitation among those who knew one another well was to come and eat an egg—hence the expression, when somebody was not received in a particular household, that "he had never cracked a hen's egg in their house".<sup>40</sup>

Some hostesses tried to make their dinner-parties informal, but custom was against them. The Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch, for instance, did their best to create a friendly atmosphere, in the 'sixties, by having two "at home" days a week at Dalkeith, when anybody was welcome to dinner. But according to Dr. Alexander Carlyle it was the wrong policy, and they would have done better to invite small, well-chosen parties; those who did attend scarcely knew one another, so that conversation was more difficult than ever.<sup>41</sup>

The really friendly gatherings were the small supper-parties of seven or eight people, in the French style.<sup>42</sup> The fame of the ones given by Lord Kames, David Hume and Lord Elibank spread far and wide: a few guests would be invited and others would drop in as they could, sure of a welcome; and after a simple meal lively conversation and merriment would go on sometimes until after midnight.

One custom which was common in both England and

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Scotland, but would now be most unpopular, was that of paying social calls at breakfast time. It was easy to account for in England, where breakfast for people in high society was a leisurely meal served at about ten o'clock, but it would be interesting to know how many people accepted Lord Kames's standing invitation to breakfast at nine.<sup>43</sup>

Catering for unexpected guests at breakfast was fairly easy. Dinner was a different proposition, and when people turned up uninvited they were considerate enough to arrive early, to give the housewife time to order a bigger meal. While it was being got ready they were generally taken for a walk.<sup>44</sup> Or, if they were like Sir James Campbell of Kilbryde, they would make themselves at home and help themselves now and then to a potato from the pot on the fire.<sup>45</sup>

Highland hospitality was a byword. Nobody dreamt of passing a friend's house without calling in, and it was not thought necessary either to send invitations or to give warning of a visit. The door was seldom locked, and any visitor was received with a great show of pleasure.<sup>46</sup> If the hostess did have a sinking feeling when she saw a neighbouring chieftain arriving with his henchman, his bard, his piper and the whole of his retinue she gave no sign of her dismay. Somehow she would provide food for them all, and room for them to sleep, taking comfort, perhaps, in the thought that her husband would one day return the visit, taking with him his servants and kinsmen "besides a number of the common sort, who have no particular employment, but follow him only to partake of the cheer".<sup>47</sup> While a Highlander would have been ashamed of shutting his door against anybody, he held it equally unpardonable if a friend refused him anything he wanted. With his own followers a chieftain was expected to be generous, and, particularly before 1745, whether he was naturally so or not he found it best to appear open-handed in order to retain their support.<sup>48</sup>

It was difficult enough for the household when one large party descended upon it. When two companies arrived at the same time, by mutual arrangement, without having bothered to warn their host that they were on the way, it



was really too much. It happened to Lord Lovat in 1743, when the Laird of McLeod and all his cavalcade "trysted" at Beaufort with the Laird of McIntosh and all his. There was plenty of food for them, but not nearly enough beds (there were only fourteen in the house); and one can sympathise with his lordship's lament, "I wish with all my soul that they had made their tryst at some other time".<sup>49</sup> But his visitors had no inkling of his feelings, any more than the numerous guests of Mrs. Elizabeth Rose of Kilravock suspected that she was badly overwrought with having no time to herself.<sup>50</sup> In spite of shortage of accommodation guests sometimes stayed for months at a time, just as they did in remote districts of Wales.<sup>51</sup>

The provision of food for Highland gatherings was seldom much trouble, although its cooking must have been. As we have seen, most estates were fully self-supporting, and in many parts there were unlimited supplies of game and fish. As Adam Smith pointed out, many Highland proprietors were in the same position as the great Earl of Warwick, who used every day to entertain thirty thousand people at his different manors. Quite the easiest way of disposing of surplus agricultural produce, when there was nothing for which to exchange it, was to give it away in hospitality.<sup>52</sup> Many a laird did it in grand style. Things were still much the same as Taylor, the "water-poet", had found them in the preceding century: he spoke of houses like castles, where the master and his family were poorly clad in homespun and yet relieved three or four score of beggars every day; "and besides all this", he said, they "can give noble entertainment for foure or five dayes together, to five or sixe Earles and Lords, besides Knights, Gentlemen, and their followers, if they bee three or foure hundred men and horse of them; where they shall not onely feede but feast, and not feast but banket".<sup>53</sup>

However large the annual produce of an estate, the host might occasionally be caught unprepared. That was where the tenants came in useful, with their kain-fowls and other rent-payments in kind. At Dunstaffnage, and perhaps in

other places as well, there was a recognised method of calling for their help. When a crowd of visitors arrived, the laird straightway had a pole erected on the battlements of the castle, with a tablecloth flying from it. That was a signal to the tenants to bring salmon and anything else which they thought would be useful.<sup>54</sup> We may be sure that they responded valiantly; there was nothing the ordinary Highlander liked better than meeting strangers.

The stray traveller to the Highlands and islands had no reason to complain of lack of hospitality, and it was well that he did not, for the accommodation in most of the inns was appalling. From some accounts the Highlanders seem to have been constantly on the look-out for visitors, and to have pressed hospitality upon them much as Irish landlords used to do. As soon as a stranger was seen approaching, the laird used to set out to meet him, preceded by his servants carrying milk and cream.<sup>55</sup> The host drank from the bowl, then handed it to his guest, and then passed it to any others present, the whole ceremony being carried on with almost religious solemnity, with everybody standing.<sup>56</sup> Indoors, when the visitor was comfortably settled, a maid-servant would fetch a pair of her master's clean stockings and a pair of shoes for him to wear while she washed and cleaned his own. Meanwhile another servant killed a sheep, and put the four quarters into a cauldron to boil; and in due time he served the broth and set a heap of bannocks on the table, and the guest was pressed to eat. At bedtime, if there was not enough room in the house, a servant took the visitor to the barn and provided him with a bed of clean straw and blankets; and next morning there would be somebody to give him breakfast and set him on his way.<sup>57</sup> But he might not get far. If the neighbours heard of his coming they too would want to entertain him, and would be sadly offended if he tried to hurry on.<sup>58</sup> The hospitality was far beyond anything commonly found in England,<sup>59</sup> or, for that matter, in the more populous coastal districts of Scotland, where strangers were sometimes regarded in rather a hostile light.<sup>60</sup>

In return for all their efforts the Highlanders wanted only one thing—as full an account as possible of their visitors' comings and goings. Their curiosity was proverbial,<sup>61</sup> and any traveller who got away without divulging his name or business, although a disappointment, was a source of conjecture for some time after. One Englishman touring the Highlands in 1704 was probably discussed over and over again in no flattering terms. He had lost his way, and arrived very early one morning in a village of about a dozen houses. Later in the day he would have attracted all the interest he wanted, and more, but, as it was, nobody replied to his insistent knocking at doors. "I then fell to unthatching a house", he afterwards recalled, "and pulled off some of the turfe"; and at that somebody *did* come out to him.<sup>62</sup> But no doubt he was soon forgiven, for the excitement which his arrival caused in the village.

Anybody at all was welcome who could bring news. On that account the hordes of licensed beggars, or "gaberlunzie men", were able to make a good living. While wandering about the country in his blue coat with a tin badge a beggar picked up all kinds of information, and lonely housewives in out-of-the-way districts were glad to give him a meal while they gossiped with him.<sup>63</sup> Town-dwellers were just as greedy for news, but for them it was easier to come by. Edinburgh itself had its full share of scandal and gossip, and Mary Somerville's aunt, who lived there, revelled in it. She used to take her embroidery to a window from which she could watch the passers-by; and every now and then she picked up her small telescope and gazed across into a neighbour's dressing-room to see what she was doing. But another relation of hers, a spinster of good family, carried her gossip too far. She was eventually tried for slander and condemned to a month's imprisonment in the Tolbooth.<sup>64</sup>

On winter evenings in the Highlands, when the news was all told, the next best thing was to get the old people to tell "the tales of the times of old", or to recite the songs of the bards.<sup>65</sup> Some families still kept a bard of their own,

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and listened enthralled while he recounted the exploits of heroes and traced the course of ancient battles. At other times the company would take turns in telling stories of ghosts and witches, the more hair-raising the better.<sup>66</sup>

Ghost stories are not the best prelude to bed, and many people preferred to end the day with a dance. Public dancing was frowned upon by the Kirk, and often denounced from the pulpit,<sup>67</sup> but there was no objection to a "domestic hop", as it was sometimes called. "Hop" was really much too mild a word: the Highlanders danced their reels and country-dances with tremendous vivacity and spirit, and kept going for hours on end.<sup>68</sup> The minuet was far too slow for their taste.<sup>69</sup> When called upon to dance it the ladies would untuck the skirts of their gowns and the partners would go through the movements with due solemnity. That done, skirts would be buttoned up again<sup>70</sup> and the company would relieve their pent-up energies in a jig, the Gillie Callum, the Shean Trews or some other vigorous step<sup>71</sup>—all, that is, except the married women, for, however young they were, and however much they itched to trip it with the rest, etiquette forbade them to do more than "tread the measure".<sup>72</sup> It was irksome for them to have to dance so sedately, but they were at least saved from the fate of one gentleman of James Boswell's acquaintance, whose over-sprightliness had earned him a wooden leg.<sup>73</sup>

As far as vigour went, there was little to choose between Highland and Lowland dances. In the Highlands dancing was perhaps a little more spontaneous. At short notice candles would be lighted, fiddlers would play up, and the company would take partners, regardless of rank; and there was sure to be plenty of whisky punch at hand to restore flagging energies.<sup>74</sup> Farther south there was rather more in the way of etiquette. Admittedly, even there a lady could engage herself to a partner for the evening and then, without a word to him, jump up and dance a reel with somebody else. That, according to Colonel Thornton, was the strange habit throughout Scotland, and he com-

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plained that it put gentlemen in a very disagreeable situation.<sup>75</sup> However, in other respects dances were conducted by an orderly routine. At the Glasgow dances, round about 1780, the company used to begin with tea, at six o'clock. No servants attended: the tea (a strong brew of green and black) was handed round by the men. Then the dancing began, and went on until ten o'clock, with short intervals for sucking sweets and drinking white wine negus or rum punch. From ten until eleven there was a break for supper, consisting of fowls, hams, jellies and other good things, with more negus and punch. Then, after a song or two, dancing would begin again and go on until morning.<sup>76</sup>

The fiddlers for a dance such as that were hired. There was no difficulty in obtaining them, for there were plenty of accomplished violinists. Girls and boys were taught to play not only the violin but also the guitar, the spinet and, later on, the piano, so that they were well prepared for the musical evenings which were such a feature of eighteenth-century society. The polite guest took part in trios or quartets as if they were the main delight of his life (as in some cases, no doubt, they were), or accepted an invitation to dinner, as Lord Kames did, principally in order "to be enchanted with good music upon the guitar".<sup>77</sup> The unmusical were probably thankful that music was religiously avoided on Sundays.<sup>78</sup> One suspects that some of them would have agreed with the fictitious Miss Pratt when, to somebody's suggestion of music, she retorted, "Music! fiddlesticks! For any sake, let us have one night of peace and rest—for I declare Lord Rossville makes a perfect toil of music; but, indeed, it's the same every where now—there's not a house you go into but some of the family are musical."<sup>79</sup>

There were plenty of other ways of passing the evening—playing cards, for instance. Whist was the favourite card game,<sup>80</sup> but, whatever the game, it was made an excuse for betting. Unfortunately, shortage of ready money sometimes made it impossible to settle up at the time, and an elaborate

system of book-keeping had to be introduced, by which debts were transferred from one player to another. That was all right for close friends, but, according to a rather embittered English visitor, it made a stranger loath to play. If he lost he was naturally expected to pay at once, before he went away; but, if he happened to win, his opponents referred him to twenty different people before he could expect his money, and he was lucky if he ever got it at all.<sup>81</sup>

Those who disliked card-playing could spend their leisure at billiards or on the bowling-green. Ladies played as well as men,<sup>82</sup> and shared in the mild form of betting which was introduced on the slightest pretext. It was harmless enough, especially as here, too, the debts might be nothing more than book entries.

Children's pastimes were similar to what they are now. There was no stamp-collecting, it is true, and the collecting of coins, which was a popular hobby among their elders,<sup>83</sup> was far too expensive for them. But they already flew their kites, skipped, rolled their hoops and whipped their tops; and they played ball, marbles, hop-scotch and leap-frog just as children do to-day.<sup>84</sup> Small boys beat the drums and blew the trumpets provided by their fond grandparents, with utter disregard for sensitive ears, as they have done ever since. And fathers, then as now, bought their children mechanical toys for the pleasure of playing with them themselves. That kind of toy was as yet rather uncertain in performance, and when Professor Dalzel bought a twopenny cannon and tried to make it go off he terrified himself as much as he did his children, "till at last he got behind a washing-tub, and then, fastening the match to the end of a long stick, set the piece of ordnance off gloriously".<sup>85</sup>

Children in remote parts of the country had to be content with simpler toys, but they got any amount of pleasure from a makeshift one such as a "totum" made from a painted button-mould.<sup>86</sup> But the youngsters to be envied were the ones who lived in Edinburgh and were taken, now and then, to the Krames, the narrow arcade of booths on the north

side of St. Giles' Cathedral.<sup>87</sup> All kinds of toys and other attractions glittered on the little stands, and the problem of which to buy and take home took just as long to solve as the grown-ups were prepared to wait.

Most boys and girls had little leisure. Children were kept closely at their books, and time-wasting was not encouraged. Even so fond an uncle as Dr. John Clephane could write seriously to his eleven-year-old niece, in the 'fifties, about her choice of amusements: "Sliding on the ice you are fond of, it seems. It is a wholesome but a dangerous exercise, especially for your sex, Bessy, whom custom has fettered with coats and petticoats, whereby you may be brought sometimes to some unlucky falls and situations. Consider this, and think how soon it may be proper to abandon this diversion. Cutting paper is an innocent amusement, but unless you come to excel greatly, it will soon prove trifling"; and more to the same effect.<sup>88</sup> The worthy doctor might have approved of little John Wilson, aged five, afterwards to achieve fame as Christopher North. Much kirk-going had made a great impression on him, and he was already an adept at preaching. One sermon was so popular with his sisters and the servants that he was often called upon to repeat it, standing on a chair arranged as a pulpit. The text was one of his own: "There was a fish, and it was a deil o' a fish, and it was ill to its young anes"; and in an eloquent discourse he pointed a contrast between good and bad parents, while his audience rocked with laughter.<sup>89</sup>

At certain times of the year, in most households, the children could be as gay as they pleased. The main time for merriment was either Christmas or the New Year. There was a great difference of opinion as to which should be celebrated. The people of Montrose settled the matter to their own satisfaction by keeping both: they began a round of visiting at Christmas that went on for some weeks.<sup>90</sup> Elsewhere, too, little work was done for several days; servants were free to go visiting, and the poorest had beef or mutton on their tables and entertained friends.<sup>91</sup> Usually

the Episcopalians followed the English custom of keeping Christmas and the Presbyterians the French one of keeping the New Year,<sup>92</sup> but few Presbyterians objected to joining their Episcopalian friends in their festivities on the "daft days", as they called the Christmas season. Some of those who did object made a point of fasting on Christmas Day, or at least of refusing to eat goose, which they condemned as a superstitious bird.<sup>93</sup> One of the Presbyterian ministers of Elgin, early in the century, had such strong views on Christmas poultry that he used to search people's houses to make sure that they were not having any.<sup>94</sup>

In the Hebrides the Christmas and New Year celebrations were somewhat similar. On Christmas Eve the servants and tenants gathered in the laird's mansion. A bullock's hide was ready for the occasion, and various members of the party took it outside the house, got hold of it with their left hands and stretched it out. Then, with sticks in their right hands, they beat it as hard and as fast as they could. They repeated the ceremony indoors. Then they cut a piece of the hide and burnt it in a candle-flame, and each member of the family smelt at it in turn.<sup>95</sup> The New Year custom was for a man to dress himself in a cow's hide and for the rest of the men to beat it with sticks. The company pretended to be frightened at the noise, and rushed out of the house, and the door was then shut; and to regain admission they had to recite a verse.<sup>96</sup>

Another day of festivities, especially in north-east Scotland and Orkney, was Shrove Tuesday, otherwise called Brose Day or Bannock Day. The company met in the afternoon for a feast of brose and bannocks. In the brose dish there were dropped a ring, a sixpence, a bawbee and a button. The family and guests stood round it, each with a spoon, and dipped in turn, and the ones who found the ring and other articles learnt their fate as regards marriage. Then there were games, and later on everybody stood round again while the bannocks were made and cooked. They too had rings, buttons and other fortune-telling trifles dropped into them.<sup>97</sup>



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The principal time for such fortune-telling was Hallow-e'en. There were many ways of foretelling marriage, such as shutting one's eyes and pulling a plant of kale: its size and shape were believed to indicate the size and shape of the husband or wife, and any earth sticking to the root represented wealth. Another custom was to take a candle and go alone to a looking-glass, and there eat an apple; and the face of the future partner would appear in the glass. But the young couple were not always content with such an uncertain prophecy: they already had a quite clear idea of the person they wanted to marry. To learn the outcome of a particular courtship they put two nuts in the fire side by side, giving one the man's name and the other the woman's. According as they burnt quietly together or jumped apart, the wooing would be successful or a failure.<sup>98</sup>

For the rest, different districts kept different holidays, often at the time of the local fair. But in one very solemn parish, Auchterderran, in Fife, the people had only one day's holiday in the whole year—Handsel Monday, the first Monday in the year. Even that they spent sitting quietly with their families.<sup>99</sup> (It was claimed, indeed, that nothing had tended more to keep religion alive in Scotland than that holidays were observed with the same religious sanctity as the Sabbath.<sup>100</sup>) Handsel Monday in some parts was as festive an occasion as Christmas or the New Year.<sup>101</sup>

Some people already went away for summer holidays, often for reasons of health. Inveresk used to be full of holidaymakers (mostly from Edinburgh) who were attracted by the good air and fine houses and gardens, as Londoners were to the Kensington gravel pits, Hampstead, Highgate and Hackney.<sup>102</sup> But eighteenth-century holidays, whether at the seaside or in the country, were not to be entered upon so lightly as they are to-day. Our only excuse for considering them in an account of Scottish domestic life is that they involved the removal of much of the contents of the home. Lodgings seldom contained anything besides the heavy standing furniture, so the family on holiday bent had

to hire a caravan or a farmer's cart, or even a sailing-packet, to carry complete sets of household goods. If they chose the district carefully they might, perhaps, manage by taking (besides clothes) some chairs, tables and mattresses and a supply of linen, crockery, cutlery and similar articles. Otherwise they might have to take food as well, enough to last the whole time—barrels of ship-biscuits, a barrel of meal for making scones, a supply of pieces from the winter mart, together with hams and kippered salmon, tea and sugar, and anything else that would keep.<sup>103</sup> It was not unknown for the holiday-cart to be caught in a rut and its contents overturned; but to the younger members of the party, at least, the various lets and hindrances were probably all part of the fun.

## Chapter XII

### Family Celebrations

The old customs which lingered in New Year and Hallowe'en festivities were no less slow to die in the more intimate affairs of life. Births, marriages and deaths all had their own traditional ceremonies, which were kept up in one form or another in many a Scottish home. Some were religious in origin. Others were founded on superstition, and in consequence were eyed with disapproval by the Kirk.

It was a marvel how a Highland baby got through the first day of his life. Take little William Grant of Rothiemurchus, for instance, born in 1798: the first thing his nurse did, even before she washed him, was to give him a spoonful of gin.<sup>1</sup> It was rather unorthodox treatment, certainly, even for those times, but only in so far as she should have given him, not gin, but a small spoonful of earth and whisky.<sup>2</sup> Washing the baby, the next process, was simply a matter of dipping him in cold water, whatever the time of year.<sup>3</sup> To add to the indignity the infant, if a male, was wrapped in a woman's shift, or, if a girl, in a man's shirt.<sup>4</sup>

Infants in the Lowlands had a much more genteel introduction. The mother would have ready "wee little mutches with lace borders, and side knots of blue three-ha'penny ribbon—long muslin frockies, vandyked across the breast . . . and tucked five rows about the tail—Welsh-flannel petticoaties . . . a coral gumstick";<sup>5</sup> also, for the baby's first visitors, a Dunlop cheese, a bottle or two of whisky, half a pint of best brandy and half a peck of shortbread. Refreshments were usually provided for the neighbours who called

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in to congratulate the mother and look appraisingly at the infant, as well as for the "gossips" who attended at the time of birth. The food might be simply cake and caudle (oatmeal gruel, with sugar, nutmeg and white wine<sup>6</sup>); or it might be special fare for the occasion, of the kind which Meg Merrilies enjoyed after the birth of Harry Bertram—groaning malt and "ken-no". Groaning malt was the ale brewed for drinking after the lady's delivery. The "ken-no" was a large, rich cheese made in secret by the women of the family, so called because the men were supposed to be unaware of its existence<sup>7</sup> (although they would doubtless have been most aggrieved if it had not been forthcoming).

A christening, among the well-to-do, was an occasion for rich silk dresses and suits and powdered wigs. Neighbours and relations turned up in full force, glad of an opportunity to wear their finery and for a break in the monotony of their lives. There was usually a reception after the ceremony was over,<sup>8</sup> and it was likely that the godfather and the other gentlemen present would soon be "all very merry", and the ladies "very blyth"; as they certainly were at one christening party.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, rumours of the festivities sometimes attracted others besides the invited guests, and great hordes of beggars would gather outside the house. So, although Sir John Foulis contributed 10s. at the kirk towards poor relief when his daughter Barbara was christened, on his return home he had to distribute another £1 : 4s. to the beggars who were waiting for him and give 14s. to an officer to keep away any more.<sup>10</sup>

Private baptisms sometimes included a ceremony of which the minister would scarcely have approved. It was the custom in Perthshire and elsewhere to put the baby in a basket on a cloth containing bread and cheese, and then to swing the basket three times round the iron crook which held the great cooking-pot. The infant was then believed to be safe from witchcraft.<sup>11</sup> For weddings as well, cheese was accredited with some supernatural quality which would scare away evil.

Weddings were naturally the merriest occasions of all,

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and every excuse was made to allow the celebrations to last for some days. The invitations were sent out in good time, and it was usual to send with them a pair of white kid-gloves for each guest. (It was understood that the glover would exchange any which did not fit.<sup>12</sup>) In Perth, where the ceremony usually took place on a Friday, the proceedings began on Wednesday with parties at the homes of the bride and bridegroom. Next day the bride's plenishing was sent to her new home, with considerable pomp. The first requirement of her dowry was that it should be serviceable : it consisted, as a rule, of one chest containing sheets and blankets and another full of body clothes ; a large press ; a chest of drawers ; a reel and spinning-wheel ; and a quantity of meal, butter and cheese. The other items varied according to family circumstances.

On the eve of the wedding the young friends of the bride and bridegroom met at their respective houses for the ceremony of feet-washing, a great occasion for fun.<sup>13</sup> The ritual of washing the feet before marriage was probably centuries old. It was the universal practice in Scotland in the early part of the eighteenth century (as it was so far away as Persia<sup>14</sup>), and among the lower classes it continued later still. As part of the frolic, and before they got down to the real business of washing, the bride's attendants sometimes borrowed the wedding ring and threw it into a pail of water. The girls scrambled for it, and the damp and lucky winner was acclaimed as the one likely to be the next to marry.<sup>15</sup>

The correct thing, after washing the feet, was to stain them with henna. The bridegroom was expected to send a good supply of it to the bride's house, and after her attendants had stained her hands and feet, and painted her eyebrows with antimony, they sent back the rest of the dye to the bridegroom for his personal use.<sup>16</sup>

On the great day the young couple decked themselves in their finery and set out with their attendants for the kirk (except where, as was the custom in Sutherland, the ceremony was to be performed at the bride's home<sup>17</sup>).

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Where funds and roads permitted, the company drove to the ceremony, but in the Highlands they might have to walk ten miles or more to the kirk; in that event the two parties used to join forces and make the journey together.<sup>18</sup> If they arrived with their pretty clothes covered with the dust of the roads the records keep it dark. In any case, the bride and bridegroom might soon look more untidy still: it was the custom in some parts immediately before the ceremony to undo every knot in their clothing—garters, shoe-strings, petticoat-strings and all; and when the wedding was over the bride had to retire in one direction and the bridegroom in another to tie them again.<sup>19</sup>

As a rule the newly married pair went straight from the kirk to their new home. When they reached the door a male attendant stepped forward carrying a large two-handed wooden bowl full of strong ale, and drank their health. Then, while the toast went round, one of the bridesmaids broke an oatcake over the bride's head, or scattered over her a sieveful of shortbread, and there was a general scramble for the luck-bearing fragments.<sup>20</sup>

Next came dinner, usually a sumptuous spread, but in the Hebrides consisting simply of meat boiled into broth. The bride sat at the head of the table while her husband waited on the guests. There was usually an abundance of food: the guests frequently sent presents of meat and poultry in advance; "yea," says our informant, "there is often more Fragments left than they can consume in a Quarter of a Year afterward".<sup>21</sup> The feasting did in fact sometimes go on for several weeks.

After the wedding-dinner the piper or fiddler took up his position, and the rest of the day was given to dancing. In the 'thirties there was a distinctly heartless custom whereby the wedding-guests took possession of the house for the night, and sent the bride and bridegroom to sleep in the barn, giving them nothing but straw, heath or fern for a bed and only blankets to cover them. The guests, for their part, stayed up all night, and went on dancing until long after daybreak.<sup>22</sup> The young couple were at

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least left in peace. It was far otherwise in the Hebrides : there the newly-weds were expected to sit up in bed to receive their guests ; whisky was passed round, and to end the proceedings one of the company threw two glassfuls of it in the faces of the bride and bridegroom.<sup>23</sup> Then the party withdrew to continue its celebrations elsewhere.

Generally speaking, there were three kinds of wedding. There was the " free " wedding, to which only a few friends were invited ; none of them was expected to go to any expense (although gifts of game or poultry were gratefully accepted). On a rather lower social scale was the " dinner " wedding, where the marriage party provided the dinner but the guests paid for the drink and the fiddler. Finally there was the " penny " wedding : the bridegroom provided a great quantity of food and opened the door to all and sundry ; sometimes two hundred people attended.<sup>24</sup> Each guest gave a certain sum (usually a shilling) for his dinner and paid extra for his drink. The proceeds were often sufficient to pay for furnishing the house.<sup>25</sup> A slightly different form of the penny wedding was the one arranged for a servant by her employers, who invited their own relations and friends, provided a meal, with music and dancing to follow, and at the end made a collection for the bride and bridegroom.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes the guests contributed to the cost by sending milk, butter, cheese and other provisions, or lent crockery for the occasion.<sup>27</sup>

Marriages and christenings were the red-letter events, but even deaths were attended by ceremonial of a rather grim type. As soon as word was sent round that a sick person was dying, his relations commonly turned up in force. They stayed on until the day of the funeral, and were joined in the daytime by a host of other visitors, who expected to be offered the usual light meal of bread, cheese and ale or spirits.<sup>28</sup>

The routine to be followed varied from one district to another. A fairly general practice, immediately after a death, was to cover up the mirror and the face of the clock.<sup>29</sup> When the head of a family died it was usual to spatter white

paint over the front door, to represent the tears of the household.<sup>30</sup> At night, on every night until the funeral, the corpse was "watched". In the Lowlands that was simply a matter of sitting in silence, drinking;<sup>31</sup> but the Highlanders' gruesome idea of watching was to hold a solemn dance round the corpse, and to keep up the ceremony until morning. The widow or widower, or other chief mourner, led off the first dance to the dismal strains of a lament, and neighbours and friends joined in;<sup>32</sup> and they repeated the process night after night. In some districts the practice was still being kept up quite late in the century.<sup>33</sup>

The funeral brought visitors from far and wide. A popular time for it was Sunday afternoon,<sup>34</sup> perhaps for the sake of a good attendance. It was usual in some parts to invite the whole parish;<sup>35</sup> but the procession at the burial of Lachlan Mackintosh of Mackintosh in 1704 may well have been a record—it stretched four miles.<sup>36</sup> Although the "lifting" might not be until two or three o'clock, the mourners would arrive at any time from ten in the morning onwards. The guests were always received in absolute silence; "every countenance was moulded into a most lugubrious expression; and in moving to their seats, the guests walked as if treading on eggs".<sup>37</sup> But as soon as grace was said there began a series of "services" well calculated to remove all traces of melancholy. They were not services in the ecclesiastical sense—far from it. They were services of food and drink, mainly drink. In a typical series the first service consisted of bread and cheese with ale and porter. Next came a glass of rum with "burial bread". Pipes of tobacco were passed round as the third service, to prepare the guests for the fourth, fifth and sixth: a glass of port wine with cake, a glass of sherry with cake, and a glass of whisky. The seventh was another glass of wine. Then it was usual to say another grace, but not as a sign that the proceedings were over, for as soon as another guest arrived the services began all over again.<sup>38</sup> Funeral customs varied a little between one place and another, but that was the kind of thing that went on in many parts of



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Scotland. It is scarcely surprising that when at last the company had ambled along to the place of burial they sometimes found that, in the stress of maintaining their balance, they had left the body behind!

By the time the funeral was over, the company were beginning to feel the need for something more sustaining, and those of them who were invited back to the house were prepared to make it a lengthy business. From the amount of food provided they were certainly expected to do so. Laurence Oliphant's provision for his mother's funeral feast, in 1729, was fairly modest, as things went: he provided simply a leg of beef, an ox, a cow, a pig, four sheep, two dozen hens and six capons, with a dozen lobsters, three large cods, crabs, anchovies, capers, olives, bottled cucumbers, six mangoes, a pint of walnuts, a pot of barberries, seven hundred pickled oysters, six ox tongues, a pint of sweet oil, two pounds of "marmallit of oranges", spices, sweets, a quart bottle of good snuff, and various other oddments. He bought six dozen wine glasses, and, to fill them, ten dozen bottles of strong claret and five dozen of "small", two dozen of cherry brandy, a barrel and two dozen bottles of ordinary brandy, and a selection of other kinds of drink.<sup>39</sup> The drinks were usually the main part of the feast, and the local tavern was apt to sell out the whole of its stock before the demand was satisfied (as James Boswell had the misfortune to find when he landed on the Isle of Mull in 1773, shortly after a funeral on the island, hoping to buy some rum or brandy for his boatmen.<sup>40</sup>) Sir James Dick of Prestonfield may therefore be commended for his forethought: some years before his death he had his lead coffin made ready, and he kept it in his bedroom filled with bottles of old wine.<sup>41</sup>

Funeral feasts, like wedding parties, were sometimes kept up for days. That was specially true of the Highlands.<sup>42</sup> When Lachlan Mackintosh died, in 1704, his Inverness-shire mansion was filled with guests for a whole month, and cooks and confectioners were brought specially from Edinburgh to cater for them.<sup>43</sup> It is easy to understand why the

company should be reluctant to break up, considering the difficulty they must have had in gathering together at all. The same kind of thing happened in Iceland, where it was not unknown for a party of twelve hundred guests to stay on for fourteen days.<sup>44</sup> In most parts of England, on the other hand, it was easier for friends and relations to meet, and it was perhaps on that account that the only refreshments usually offered before and after funerals were two or three cups of wine, either red or white, boiled with sugar and cinnamon.<sup>45</sup>

Expenditure on funerals in England was lavish, but it went less on the entertainment of the guests than on outward show—weepers, mourning rings and the rest of the paraphernalia. In Scotland, no matter how unpretentious the arrangements, to any family which provided the customary "services" a funeral cost at least £100 Scots (£8:6:8 sterling).<sup>46</sup> Usually the sum was far greater. The waste of money and time frequently aroused the disapproval of the kirk.<sup>47</sup> It is surprising to find families normally careful in their expenditure spending as much on funeral celebrations as would have kept them for a year or more. For instance, when Sir William Hamilton died, in 1704, the expenses came to £5189 Scots, or £432:8:4 sterling, more than two years of his salary as a judge.<sup>48</sup>

The effort to make a good show at a funeral left some families badly crippled financially, particularly when it was the head of the family who had died. It was customary in the Highlands on such an event to write to all the relations of the deceased person who lived near enough, inviting them to a roup. None of them declined if they found it possible to be there, for it was a jolly occasion, and a wonderful opportunity to gossip with kinsfolk not seen, perhaps, for many a year. There was always a good dinner provided, with plenty to drink. In return for their day's pleasure the guests cheerfully fulfilled the duty expected of them: to buy up the contents of the home at prices higher than they would have dreamt of paying elsewhere.<sup>49</sup>

At an upper-class funeral it was customary for the

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successor to the estate to act as host. That was all very well so long as the succession was clear and undisputed; otherwise things were apt to be difficult. But Scottish courtesy was proof against trials, as one cannot but realise on reading of the funeral of Sir Robert Burnett of Leys, in 1759. The succession was claimed by George Burnett of Kemnay on behalf of his son. It was also claimed by Sir Thomas Burnett of Criggie. Both were at Crathes Castle for the funeral; but, far from jangling about their rights, each of them behaved as an exemplary host, and treated the other most politely and hospitably as his guest. With such a charming picture of unfailing courtesy we might well have taken leave of our eighteenth-century friends. But the strain had been too great. Kemnay's patience gave out. At an opportune moment he locked up the castle and departed, taking with him the great key of the door.<sup>50</sup> And what Sir Thomas said to that is perhaps better left in obscurity.

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